

THE ARGOSY.

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THE STORY OF CHARLES STRANGE.

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CHAPTER XVI.

LEAH'S STORY.

OUR dismayed faces might have formed a study for a painter, as we stood in my room in Essex Street: the doctor, George Coney, Lennard, and myself. On the floor between the hearthrug and the desk, lay the dead man, the blaze of the fire and the gas-lights playing on his features. Mr. Brightman was dead. In my mental pain and emotion I could not realise the fact; would not believe that it was true. He had died thus suddenly, no one near him; no one, so far as was yet known, in the house at the time. And to me, at least, there seemed to be some mystery attaching to it.

But, at this particular moment, we were looking for George Coney's sovereigns, which Mr. Brightman, not much more than an hour before, had locked up in the deep drawer of his desk, returning the keys to his pocket. After Dr. Dickenson had handed me the keys I unlocked and opened the drawer. But the bag was not there.

If the desk itself had disappeared, I could not have been more surprised. Lying in the drawer close to where the bag had been, was a gold watch belonging to Mrs. Brightman, which had been brought up to town to be cleaned. That was undisturbed. "Coney," I exclaimed, "the money is not here."

"It was put there," replied young Coney. "Next to that watch."

"I know it was," I answered. I opened the drawer on the other side, but that was full of papers. I looked about on the desk; then on my own desk, even unlocking the drawers, though I had had the key in my own pocket; then on the tables and mantelpiece. Not a trace could I see of the canvas bag.

"What bag is it?" inquired Dr. Dickenson, who, of course, had known nothing of this. "What was in it?"

"A small canvas bag containing some gold that Mr. George Coney had wished to leave here until Monday," I answered.

"'Twas one of our sample barley bags; I happened to have it in my pocket when I left home," explained the young man. "My father's initials were on it: S. C."

"How much was in it?" asked Lennard.

"Thirty pounds."

"I fear you will be obliged to go without it, after all," I said, when I had turned everything over, "for it is not to be found. I will remit you thirty pounds on Monday. We send our spare cash to the bank on Saturday afternoons, so that I have not so much in the house: and I really do not know where Mr. Brightman has put the cheque-book. It is strange that he should have taken the bag out of the drawer again."

"Perhaps it may be in one of his pockets," suggested the doctor.

"Shall I search them?"

"No, no," interposed George Coney. "I wouldn't have the poor gentleman disturbed just for that. You'll remit it to me, Mr. Strange. Not to my father," he added, with a smile: "to me."

I went down with him, and there sat Leah at the bottom of the stairs, leaning her head against the banisters, almost under the hall lamp. "When did you come in, Leah?" I asked.

She got up hastily, and faced me. "I thought you were out, sir. I have come in only this instant."

"What is the matter?" I continued, struck with the white, strange look upon her face. "Are you ill?"

"No, sir, not ill. Trouble is the lot of us all."

I shook hands with George Coney as he got into his cab, and departed; and then returned indoors. Leah was hastening along the passage to the kitchen stairs. I called her back again. "Leah," I said, "do you know what has happened to Mr. Brightman?"

"No, sir," answered she. "What has happened to him?"

"You must prepare for a shock. He is dead."

She had a cloth and a plate in her hand, and laid them down on the slab as she backed against the wall, staring in horror. Then her features relaxed into a wan smile.

"Ah, Master Charles, you are thinking to be a boy again to-night, and are playing a trick upon me, as you used to do in the old days, sir."

"I wish to my heart it was so, Leah. Mr. Brightman is lying upon the floor in my room. I fear there can be no doubt that he is dead."

"My poor master," she slowly ejaculated. "Heaven have mercy upon him!—and upon us! Why, it's not more than three-quarters of an hour since I took up some water for him."

"Did he ask for it?"

"He rang the bell, sir, and told me to bring up a decanter of water and a tumbler."

"How did he look then, Leah? Where was he sitting?"

"He was sitting at his table, sir, and he looked as usual, for all I saw, but his head was bent over something he was reading. I put some coals on the fire and came away. Mr. Charles, who is up there with him?"

"Dr. Dickenson, and ——"

A knock at the door interrupted me. It proved to be the other doctor I had sent for.

The medical men proceeded to examine Mr. Brightman more closely. I had sent for the police, and they also were present. I then searched his pockets, a policeman aiding me, and we put their contents carefully away. But there was no bag containing gold amongst them. How had it disappeared?

A most unhappy circumstance was that I could not send for Mrs. Brightman, for I did not know where she was. Mr. Brightman had said she was out of town, but did not say where.

When Watts came home, I despatched him to the house at Clapham, allowing him no time to indulge his grief or his curiosity. Leah had knelt down by Mr. Brightman, tears silently streaming from her eyes.

The fire in the front room was relighted; the fire, the very coals, which he, poor man, had so recently taken off; and I, Lennard and Arthur Lake went in there to talk the matter over quietly.

"Lennard," I said, "I am not satisfied that he has died a natural death. I hope ——"

"There are no grounds for any other supposition, Mr. Strange," he interrupted. "None whatever. *Are* there?" he added, looking at me.

"I trust there are none—but I don't quite like the attendant circumstances of the case. The loss of that bag of money causes all sorts of unpleasant suspicions to arise. When you came to the house, Lennard, did you go straight upstairs?" I added, after a pause.

"No, I went into the front office," replied Lennard. "I thought Sir Edmund Clavering might still be here."

"Was Leah out or in?"

"Leah was standing at the front door, looking—as it seemed to me—down the steps leading to the Thames. While I was lighting my candle by the hall-lamp, she shut the front door and came to me. She was extremely agitated, and ——"

"Agitated?" I interrupted.

"Yes," said Lennard; "I could not be mistaken. I stared at her, wondering what could cause it, and why her face was so white—almost as white as Mr. Brightman's is now. She asked—as earnestly as if she were pleading for life—whether I would stop in the house for a few minutes, as Mr. Brightman had not gone, while she ran out upon an errand. I inquired whether Sir Edmund Clavering was upstairs, and she said no; he had left; Mr. Strange was out, and Mr. Brightman was alone."

"Did she go out?"

"Immediately," replied Lennard; "just as she was, without bonnet or shawl. I went up to your room, and tapped at the door. It was not answered, and I went in. At first I thought the room was empty; but in a moment I saw Mr. Brightman lying on the ground. He was dead even then; I am certain of it," added Lennard, pausing from natural emotion. "I raised his head, and put a little water to his temples, but I saw that he was dead."

"It is an awful thing!" exclaimed Lake.

"I can tell you that I thought so," assented Lennard. "I knew that the first thing must be to get in a doctor; but how I found my way up the street to Dickenson's I hardly remember. No wonder I left the front door open behind me."

I turned all this over in my mind. There were two points I did not like—Leah's agitation, and Lennard's carelessness in leaving the door open. I called in one of the policemen from the other room, for they were there still, with the medical men.

"Williams," I began, "you saw me come down the street with my latchkey in my hand?"

"I did, sir, and wished you good evening," replied Williams. "It wasn't long after the other gentleman," indicating Lennard, "had run out."

"I did not see you," cried Lennard, looking at him. "I wish I had seen you. I wanted help, and there was not a soul in the street."

"I was standing in shadow, at the top of the steps leading to the water," said the man. "You came out, sir, all in a hurry, and went rushing up the street, leaving the door open."

"And it is that door's having been left open that I don't like," I observed. "If this money does not turn up, I can only think some rogue got in and took it."

"Nobody got in, sir," said the policeman. "I had my eye on the door the whole time till you came down. To see two folk running like mad out of a quiet and respectable house roused my suspicions; and I went up to the door and stood near it till you entered."

"How did you see two running out of it?" I inquired. "There was only Mr. Lennard."

"I had seen somebody before that; a woman," replied the officer. "She came out, and went tearing down the steps towards the river, calling to someone out of sight. I think it was your servant, Mrs. Watts, but I was only half-way down the street then, and she was too quick for me."

"Then you are quite sure no one entered?"

"Quite sure, sir. I never moved from the door."

"Setting aside Williams's testimony, there was scarcely time for anyone to get in and do mischief," observed Lake. "And no one could take that gold without first getting the keys out of Mr. Bright-

man's pocket," he rejoined. "For such a purpose, who would dare rifle the pockets of the dead?"

"And then replace the keys," added Lennard.

"Besides," I said impulsively, "no one knew the money was there. Mr. Brightman, myself, and George Coney were alone cognisant of the fact. The more one thinks of it, the stranger it seems to grow."

The moments passed. The doctors and the police had gone away, and nothing remained but the sad burden in the next room. Lennard also left me to go home, for there was nothing more to be done; and Arthur Lake, who had gone round to his rooms, came in again. His conscience was smiting him, he said, for having deserted me. We sat down in the front room, as before, and began to discuss the mystery. I remarked, to begin with, that there existed not the slightest loophole of suspicion to guide us.

"Except one," said Lake quietly. "And I may pain you, Charley, if I venture to suggest it."

"Nonsense!" I cried. "How could it pain me? Unless you think I took it myself!"

"I fancy it was Leah."

"Leah?"

"Well, I do. She was the only person in the house, except Mr. Brightman. And what did her agitation mean—the agitation Lennard has referred to?"

"No, no, Arthur; it could not have been Leah. Admitting the doubt for a moment, how could she have done it?"

"Only in this way. I have been arguing it out with myself in my rooms: and of course it may be all imagination. Leah took up some water, she says, that Mr. Brightman rang for. Now it may be that he had the drawer open and she saw the money. Or it may even be that, for some purpose or other, he had the bag upon the table. Was he taken ill while she was in the room? and did she, overcome by temptation, steal the money? I confess that this possibility presents itself forcibly to me," concluded Lake. "Naturally she would afterwards be in a state of agitation."

I sat revolving what he said, but could not bring my mind to admit it. Circumstances—especially her agitation—might seem to tell against her, but I believed the woman to be honest as the day.

There is not the slightest doubt that almost every man born into the world is adapted for one especial calling over all others; and it is an unhappy fact that this peculiar tendency is very rarely discovered and followed up. It is the misdirection of talent which causes so many of the failures in life. In my own case this mistake had not occurred. I believe that of all pursuits common to man, I was by nature most fitted for that of a solicitor. At the Bar, as a pleader, I should have failed, and ruined half the clients who entrusted me with briefs. But for penetration, for seizing, without effort, the different points of a case laid before me, few equalled me.

I mention this only because it is a fact: not from motives of self-praise and vanity. Vanity? I am only thankful that my talents were directed into their proper channel. And this judgment, exercised now, told me that Leah was not guilty. I said so to Arthur Lake.

The return of Watts interrupted us. He had brought back with him Mr. Brightman's butler, Perry: a respectable, trustworthy man, who had been long in the family. I shall never forget his emotion as he stood over his dead master, to whom he was much attached. Mrs. and Miss Brightman had gone to Hastings for two or three days, he said, and I determined to go there in the morning and break the sad tidings to them.

Sad tidings, indeed; a grievous calamity for all of us. That night I could not sleep, and in the morning I rose unrefreshed. The doubt about Leah and the money also troubled me. Though in one sense convinced that she could not have done it, the possibility that she might be guilty kept presenting itself before me.

She came into the room while I was at breakfast—earlier than I need have been, so far as the train was concerned—and I detained her for a moment.

Very spruce and neat she looked this morning.

"Leah," I began, "there is an unpleasant mystery attending this affair."

"As to what Mr. Brightman has died of, sir?"

"I do not allude to that. But there is some money missing."

"Money!" echoed Leah, in what looked like genuine surprise.

"Last night, after Mr. Brightman came in from dinner, he put a small canvas bag, containing thirty pounds in gold, in the deep drawer of his desk in my room, locked it and put the keys in his pocket. I had occasion to look for that gold immediately after he was found dead, and it was gone."

"Bag and all?" said Leah, after a pause.

"Bag and all."

"Not stolen, surely?"

"I don't see how else it can have disappeared. It could not go without hands; and the question is, did anyone get into the house and take it?"

She looked at me, and I at her: she was apparently thinking. "But how could anyone get in, sir?" she asked in tones of remonstrance.

"I do not see how, unless it was when you went out, Leah. You were out some time, you know. You ran out of the house and down the steps leading to the river, and you were in great agitation. What did it mean?"

Leah threw her hands up in distress. "Oh, Mr. Charles!" she gasped. "Please don't question me, sir. I cannot tell you anything about that."

"I must know it, Leah."

She shook her head. Her tears had begun to fall.

"Indeed you must explain it to me," I continued, speaking gently. "There is no help for it. Don't you see that this will have to be investigated, and——"

"You never suspect me of taking the money, sir?" she exclaimed breathlessly.

"No, I do not," I replied firmly. "It is one thing to be sure of honesty, and quite another thing to wish mysterious circumstances cleared up, where the necessity for doing so exists. What was your mystery last night, Leah?"

"Must I tell you, sir?"

"Indeed you must. I daresay to tell it will not hurt you, or to hear it hurt me."

"I would die rather than Watts should know of it," she exclaimed, in low, impassioned tones, glancing towards the door.

"Watts is in the kitchen, Leah, and cannot hear you. Speak out."

"I never committed but one grave fault in my life," she began, "and that was telling a deliberate lie. The consequences have clung to me ever since, and if things go on as they are going on now, they'll just drive me into the churchyard. When I lived with your people I was a young widow, as you may remember, sir; but perhaps you did not know that I had a little child. Your mamma knew it, but I don't think the servants did, for I was never one to talk of my own affairs. Just your age, Master Charles, was my little Nancy, and when her father died his sister took to her; old Miss Williams—for she was a deal older than him. She had a bit of a farm in Dorsetshire, and I'm afraid Nancy had to work hard at it. But it failed, after a time, and Miss Williams died; and Nancy, then about seventeen, had come, I heard, to London. I was at Dover then, not long returned from abroad, and was just married to James Watts: and I found—I found," Leah dropped her voice, "that Nancy had gone wrong. Someone had turned her brain with his vows and his promises, and she had come up to London with him."

"Why don't you sit down whilst you talk, Leah?"

"I had told Watts I had no children," she continued, disregarding my injunction. "And that was the lie, Mr. Charles. More than once he had said in my hearing that he would never marry a ready-made family. For very shame I could not tell him, when I found how things were with Nancy. After we came to London, I searched her out and went to her in secret, begging her to leave the man, but she would not."

A burst of emotion stopped Leah. She soon resumed.

"She would not leave him. In spite of all I could say or do, though I went down on my knees to her and sobbed and prayed my heart out, she remained with him. And she is with him still."

"All this time?"

"All this time, sir ; seven years. He was once superior to her in position, but he has fallen from it now, is unsteady, and drinks half his time away. Sometimes he is in work ; oftener without it ; and the misery and privation she goes through, no tongue can tell. He beats her, abuses her ——"

"Why does she not leave him ?"

"Ah, sir, why don't we do many things that we ought ? Partly, because she's afraid he would keep the children. There are three of them. Many a time she would have died of hunger, but for me. I help her all I can : she's my own child. Sir, you asked me, only yesterday, why I went a figure ; but, instead of buying clothes for myself, I scrape and save, to keep her poor body and soul together. I go without food to take it to her ; many a day I put my dinner away, telling Watts I don't feel inclined for it then, and will eat it by and by. He thinks I do so. She does not beg of me ; she has never entered this house ; she has never told that tyrant of hers that I am her mother. 'Mother,' she has said to me, 'never fear. I would rather die than bring trouble on you.'"

"But about last night ?" I interrupted.

"I was at work in the kitchen when a little gravel was thrown against the window. I guessed who it was, and went up to the door. If Watts had been at home, I should have taken no notice, but just have said, 'Drat those street boys again !' or something of that sort. There she was, leaning against the opposite railings, and she crossed over when she saw me. She said she was beside herself with misery and trouble, and I believe she was. He had been beating her, and she had not tasted food since the previous day ; not a crumb. She kept looking towards the steps leading to the Thames, and I thought she might have got it in her head, what with her weak condition of body and her misery of mind, to put an end to herself. I tried, sir, to soothe and reason with her ; what else could I do ? I said I would fetch her some food, and give her sevenpence to buy a loaf to take home to her children."

"Where does she live ?" I interposed.

"In this parish, St. Clement Danes ; and there are some pairs of this parish, you know, sir, as bad as any in London. When I offered to fetch her food, she said, No, she would not take it ; her life was too wretched to bear, and she should end it ; she had come out to do so. It was just what I feared. I scolded her. I told her to stay there at the door, and I shut it and ran down for the food. But when I got back to the door, I couldn't see her anywhere. Then I heard a voice from the steps call out 'Good-bye !' and I knew she was going to the water. At that moment Mr. Lennard came up, and I asked him to remain in the house while I went out for a minute. I was almost frightened out of my senses."

"Did you find her ?"

"I found her, sir, looking down at the river. I reasoned her

into a little better mood, and she ate a little of the food, and I brought her back up the steps, gave her the sevenpence, and led her up the street and across the Strand, on her way home. And that's the whole truth, Mr. Charles, of what took me out last night; and I declare I know no more of the missing money than a babe unborn. I had just come back with the empty plate and cloth when you saw me sitting on the stairs."

The whole truth I felt sure it was. Every word, every look of Leah's proclaimed it.

"And that's my sad secret," she added; "one I have to bear about with me at all times, in my work and out of my work. Watts is a good husband to me, but he prides himself on his respectability, and I wouldn't have him know that I have deceived him for the universe. I wouldn't have him know that *she*, being what she is, was my daughter. He said he'd treat me to Ashley's Circus last winter, and gave me two shillings, and I pretended to go. But I gave it to her, poor thing, and walked about in the cold, looking at the late shops, till it was time to come home. Watts asked me what I had seen, and I told him such marvels that he said he'd go the next night himself, for he had never heard the like, and he supposed it must be a benefit night. You will not tell him my secret, sir?"

"No, Leah, I will not tell him. It is safe with me."

With a long-drawn sigh she turned to leave the room. But I stopped her.

"A moment yet, Leah. Can you remember at what time you took up the water to Mr. Brightman?"

"It was some time before the stone came to the window. About ten minutes, maybe, sir, after you went out. I heard you come downstairs whistling, and go out."

"No one came to the house during my absence?"

"No one at all, sir."

"Did you notice whether Mr. Brightman had either of the drawers of his desk open when you took up the water?"

Leah shook her head. "I can't say, sir," she answered. "I did not notice, one way or the other."

CHAPTER XVII.

LADY CLAVERING.

THE people were coming out of the various churches when I reached Hastings. Going straight to the Queen's Hotel, I asked for Mrs. Brightman. Perry had said she was staying there. It was, I believe, the only good hotel in the place in those days. Hatch, Mrs. Brightman's maid, came to me at once. Her mistress was not yet up, she said, having a bad headache.

Hatch and I had become quite confidential friends during these

past years. She was not a whit altered since I first saw her, and to me did not look a day older. The flaming ringlets adorned her face as usual, and sky-blue cap-strings flowed behind them this morning. Hatch was glaringly plain; Hatch had a wonderful tongue, and was ever ready to exercise it, and Hatch's diction and grammar were unique; nevertheless, you could not help liking Hatch.

But to hear that Mrs. Brightman was ill in bed rather checkmated me. I really did not know what to do.

"My business with your mistress is of very great importance, Hatch," I observed. "I ought to see her. I have come down on purpose to see her."

"You might see her this afternoon, Mr. Charles; not before," spoke Hatch decisively. "These headaches is uncommon bad while they last. Perhaps Miss Annabel would do? She is not here, though; but is staying with her Aunt Lucy."

"I have brought down bad news, Hatch. I should not like Miss Annabel to be the first to hear it."

"Bad news!" repeated Hatch quickly, as she stared at me with her great green eyes. "Our house ain't burnt down, surely! Is that the news, sir?"

"Worse than that, Hatch. It concerns Mr. Brightman."

Hatch's manner changed in a moment. Her voice became timid. "For goodness' sake, Mr. Charles! he is not ill, is he?"

"Worse, Hatch. He is dead," I whispered.

Hatch backed to a chair and dropped into it: we were in Mrs. Brightman's sitting-room. "The Lord be good to us!" she exclaimed, in all reverence. Her red cheeks turned white, her eloquence, for once, deserted her.

I sat down and gave her the details in a few brief words: she was a confidential, trusted servant, and had lived with her mistress many years. It affected her even more than I had expected. She wrung her hands, her tears coursed freely.

"My poor master—my poor mistress!" she exclaimed. "What on earth—Mr. Charles, is it *sure* he is dead? quite dead?" she broke off to ask.

"Nay, Hatch, I have told you."

Presently she got up, and seemed to rally her courage. "Anyway, Mr. Charles, we shall have to meet this, and deal with it as we best may. I mean the family, sir, what's left of 'em. And missis must be told—and, pardon me, sir, but I think I'd best be the one to tell her. She is so used to me, you see," added Hatch, looking at me keenly. "She might take it better from me than from you; that is, it might seem less hard."

"Indeed, I should be only too glad to be spared the task," was my answer.

"But you must tell Miss Brightman, sir, and Miss Annabel. Perhaps if you were to go now, Mr. Charles, while I do the best

I can with my missis, we might be ready for the afternoon train. That, you say, will be best to travel by ——”

“I said the train would be the best of the trains to-day, Hatch. It is for Mrs. Brightman to consider whether she will go up to-day or to-morrow.”

“Well, yes, Mr. Charles, that’s what I mean. My head’s almost mothered. But I think she is sure to go up to-day.”

Miss Brightman, who was Mr. Brightman’s only sister, lived in a handsome house facing the sea. Annabel visited her a good deal, staying with her sometimes for weeks together. Mr. Brightman had sanctioned it, Mrs. Brightman did not object to it.

Upon reaching the house, the footman said Miss Brightman was not yet in from church, and ushered me into the drawing-room. Annabel was there. And really, like Hatch, she was not much altered, except in height and years, since the day I first saw her, when she had chattered to me so freely and lent me her favourite book, “The Old English Baron.” She was fourteen then: a graceful, pretty child, with charming manners; her dark brown eyes, sweet and tender and bright like her father’s, her features delicately carved like her mother’s, a rose-blush on her dimpled cheeks. She was twenty now, and a graceful, pretty woman. No, not one whit altered.

She was standing by the fire in her silk attire, just as she had come in from church, only her bonnet-strings untied. Bonnets were really bonnets then, and rendered a lovely face all the more attractive. Annabel’s bonnet that day was pink, and its border intermingled, as it seemed, with the waves of her soft brown hair. She quite started with surprise.

“Is it *you*, Charley!” she exclaimed, coming forward, the sweet rose-blush deepening and the sweet eyes brightening. “Have you come to Hastings? Is papa with you?”

“No, Annabel, he is not with me,” I answered gravely, as I clasped her hand. “I wanted to see Miss Brightman.”

“She will be here directly. She called in to see old Mrs. Day, who is ill: a great friend of Aunt Lucy’s. Did papa ——”

But we were interrupted by the return of Miss Brightman, a small, fragile woman, with delicate lungs. Annabel left us together.

How I accomplished my unhappy task I hardly knew. How Miss Brightman subsequently imparted it to Annabel I did not know at all. It must be enough to say that we went to London by an afternoon train, bearing our weight of care. All, except Miss Brightman. Hatch travelled in the carriage with us.

In appearance, at any rate, the news had most affected Mrs. Brightman. Her frame trembled, her pale face and restless hands twitched with nervousness. Of course, her headache went for something.

“I have them so very badly,” she moaned to me once during the journey. “They unfit me for everything.”

And, indeed, these headaches of Mrs. Brightman's were nothing new to me. She had always suffered from them. But of late, that is to say during the past few months, when by chance I went to Clapham, I more often than not found her ill and invisible from this distressing pain. My intimacy with Mrs. Brightman had not made much progress. The same proud, haughty woman she was when I first saw her, she had remained. Coldly civil to me, as to others; and that was all that could be said.

When about half way up, whilst waiting for an express to pass, or something of that sort, and we were for some minutes at a standstill, I told Mrs. Brightman about the missing money belonging to George Coney.

"It is of little consequence if it be lost," was her indifferent and no doubt thoughtless comment. "What is thirty pounds?"

Little, I knew, to a firm like ours, but the uncertainty it left us in was a great deal. "Setting aside the mystery attaching to the loss," I remarked, "there remains a suspicion that we may have a thief about us; and that is not a pleasant feeling. Other things may go next."

Upon reaching London we drove to Essex Street. What a painful visit it was! Even now I cannot bear to think of it. Poor Mrs. Brightman grew nervously excited. As she looked down upon him, in his death-stillness, I thought she would have wept her heart away. Annabel strove to be calm for her mother's sake.

After some tea, which Leah and Hatch brought up to us, I saw them safely to Clapham, and then returned home.

Monday morning rose, and its work with it: the immediate work connected with our painful loss, and the future work that was to fall upon me. The chief weight and responsibility of the business had hitherto been his share; now it must be all mine. In the course of the day I sent a cheque to George Coney.

An inquest had to be held, and took place early on Tuesday morning. Mr. Brightman's death was proved, beyond doubt, to have occurred from natural causes, though not from disease of the heart. He had died by the visitation of God. But for the disappearance of the money, my thoughts would never have dwelt on any other issue.

After it was over, Lennard was standing with me in the front room, from which the jury had just gone out, when we fell to talking about the missing money and its unaccountable loss. It lay heavily upon my mind. Fathom it I could not, turn it about as I would. Edgar Lennard was above suspicion, and he was the only one, so far as he and I knew, who had been in the room after the bag was put there, Leah excepted. Of her I felt equally certain. Lennard began saying how heartily he wished he had not been told to come back that night; but I requested him to be at ease, for he had quite as much reason to suspect me, as I him.

"Not quite," answered he, smiling; "considering that you had to make it good."

"Well, Lennard, I daresay the mystery will be solved some time or other. Robberies, like murders, generally come out. The worst is, we cannot feel assured that other losses may not follow."

"Not they," returned Lennard, too confidently. "This one has been enough for us."

"Did it ever strike you, Lennard, that Mr. Brightman had been in failing health lately?"

"Often," emphatically spoke Lennard. "I think he had something on his mind."

"On his mind? I should say it was on his health. There were times when he seemed to have neither energy nor spirits for anything. You don't know how much business he has, of late, left to me that he used to do himself."

"Well," contended Lennard, "it used to strike me he was not at ease; that something or other was troubling him."

"Yes, and now that this fatal termination has ensued, we see that the trouble may have been health," I maintained. "Possibly he knew that something was dangerously wrong with him."

"Possibly so," conceded Lennard.

He was leaving the room for his own, when a clerk met him and said that Sir Edmund Clavering was asking for Mr. Strange. I bade him show up Sir Edmund.

Mr. Brightman had for years been confidential solicitor to Sir Ralph Clavering, a physician, whose baronetcy was a new one. When Sir Ralph gave up practice, and retired to an estate he bought in the country, a Mrs. Clavering, a widow, whose husband had been a distant cousin of Sir Ralph's, entered it with him, as his companion and housekeeper. It ended in his marrying her, as these companionships so often end, especially where the man is old, and the woman young, attractive and wily. Mrs. Clavering was poor, and no doubt she played for the stake she won. The heir presumptive to Sir Ralph's title was his nephew, Edmund Clavering, but his fortune he could leave to whom he would.

Sir Ralph Clavering died—only about ten days before Mr. Brightman's own death. The funeral took place on the Tuesday—this very day week of which I am writing. After attending it, Mr. Brightman returned to the office in the evening. The clerks had left and he came up to my room.

"Take this off my hat, will you, Charles," he said. "I can't go home in it, of course: and Mrs. Brightman has a superstition against hat-scarves going into the house."

I undid the black silk and laid it on the table. "What am I to do with it, sir?"

"Anything. Give it to Leah for a Sunday apron. My lady treated us to a specimen of her temper when the will was read," he added.

"She expected to inherit all, and is not satisfied with the competency left to her."

"Who does inherit?" I asked: for Mr. Brightman had never enlightened me, although I knew that he had made Sir Ralph's will.

"Edmund Clavering. And quite right that he should do so: the estate ought to go with the title. Besides, setting aside that consideration, Sir Edmund is entitled to it quite as much as my lady. More so, I think. There's the will, Charles; you can read it."

I glanced over the will, which Mr. Brightman had brought back with him. Lady Clavering had certainly a competency, but the bulk of the property was left to Sir Edmund, the inheritor of the title. I was very much surprised.

"I thought she would have had it all, Mr. Brightman. Living estranged as Sir Ralph did from his brother, even refusing to be reconciled when the latter was dying, the estrangement extended to the son, Edmund. I certainly thought Lady Clavering would have come in for all. You thought so too, sir."

"I did, until I made the will. And at one time it was Sir Ralph's intention to leave most of it to her. But for certain reasons which arose, he altered his plans. Sufficient reasons," added Mr. Brightman, in a marked, emphatic manner. "He imparted them to me when he gave instructions for his will. I should have left her less."

"May I know them?"

"No, Charles. They are told to me in confidence, and they concern neither you nor me. Is the gas out in the next room?"

"Yes. Shall I light it?"

"It is not worth while. That hand-lamp of yours will do. I only want to put up the will."

I took the lamp, and lighted Mr. Brightman into the front room, his own exclusively. He opened the iron safe, and there deposited Sir Ralph Clavering's will for safety; to be left there until it should be proved.

That is sufficient explanation for the present. Sir Edmund Clavering, shown up by Lennard himself, came into the room. I had never acted for him; Mr. Brightman had invariably done so.

"Can you carry my business through, Mr. Strange?" he asked, after expressing his shock and regret at Mr. Brightman's sudden fate.

"I hope so. Why not, Sir Edmund?"

"You have not Mr. Brightman's legal knowledge and experience."

"Not his experience, certainly; because he was an old man and I am a young one. But, as far as practice goes, I have for some time had chief control of the business. Mr. Brightman almost confined himself to seeing clients. You may trust me, Sir Edmund."

"Oh, yes, I daresay it will be all right," he rejoined. "Do you know that Lady Clavering and her cousin John—my cousin also—mean to dispute the will?"

"Upon what grounds?"

"Upon Sir Ralph's incompetency to make one, I suppose—as foul a plea as ever false woman or man invented. Mr. Brightman can prove—Good heavens! every moment I forget that he is dead," broke off Sir Edmund. "How unfortunate that he should have gone just now."

"But there cannot fail to be ample proof of Sir Ralph's competency. The servants about him must know that he was of sane and healthy mind."

"I don't know what her schemes may be," rejoined Sir Edmund, "but I do know that she will not leave a stone unturned to wrest my rights from me. I am more bitter than gall and wormwood to her."

"Because you have inherited most of the money."

"Ay, for one thing. But there's another reason, more galling to her even than that."

Sir Edmund looked at me with a peculiar expression. He was about my own age, and would have been an exceedingly pleasant man, but for his pride. When he could so far forget that as to throw it off, he was warm and cordial.

"Her ladyship is a scheming woman, Mr. Strange. She flung off into a fit of resentment at first, which Mr. Brightman witnessed, but very shortly her tactics changed. Before Sir Ralph had been three days in his grave, she contrived to intimate to me that we had better join interests. Do you understand?"

I did not know whether to understand or not. It was inconceivable.

"And I feel ashamed to enlighten you," said Sir Edmund passionately. "She offered herself to me; my willing wife. 'If you will wed no other woman, I will wed no other man——' How runs the old ballad? Not in so many words, but in terms sufficiently plain to be deciphered. I answered as plainly, and declined. Declined to join interests: declined *her*: and so made her my mortal enemy for ever. Do you know her?"

"I never saw her."

"Take care of yourself, then, should you be brought into contact with her," laughed Sir Edmund. "She is a Jezebel. All the same, she is one of the most fascinating of women: irresistibly so no doubt to many people. Had she been any but my uncle's wife—widow—I don't know how it might have gone with me. By the way, Mr. Strange, did Mr. Brightman impart to you Sir Ralph's reason for devising his property to me? He had always said, you know, that he would not do it. Mr. Brightman would not tell me the reason for the change."

"No, he did not. Sir Ralph intended, I believe, to bequeath most of it to his wife, and he altered his mind quite suddenly. So much Mr. Brightman told me."

"Found out Jezebel, perhaps, at some trick or other."

That I thought all too likely : but did not say so. Sir Edmund continued to speak a little longer upon business matters, and then rose.

"The will had better be proved without delay," he paused to say.

"I will see about it the first thing next week, Sir Edmund. It would have been done this week but for Mr. Brightman's unexpected death."

"Why do you sink your voice to a whisper?" asked Sir Edmund, as we were quitting the room. "Do you fear eavesdroppers?"

I was not conscious that I had sunk it, until recalled to the fact. "Every time I approach this door," I said, pointing to the one opening into the other room, "I feel as if I were in the presence of the dead. He is still lying there."

"What—Mr. Brightman?"

"It is where he died. He will be removed to his late residence to-night."

"I think I will see him," cried Sir Edmund, laying his hand on the door.

"As you please. I would not advise you." And he apparently thought better of it, and went down.

I had to attend the Vice-Chancellor's Court ; law business goes on without respect to the dead. Upon my return in the afternoon, I was in the front office, speaking to Lennard, when a carriage drove down the street, and stopped at the door. Our blinds were down, but one of the clerks peeped out. "A gentleman's chariot, painted black," he announced : "the servants in deep mourning."

Allan went out and brought back a card. "The lady wishes to see you, sir."

I cast my eyes on it. "Lady Clavering." And an involuntary smile crossed my face, at the remembrance of Sir Edmund's caution, should I ever be brought into contact with her. But what could Lady Clavering want with me?

She was conducted upstairs, and I followed, leaving my business with Lennard until afterwards. She was already seated in the very chair that, not two hours ago, had held her opponent, Sir Edmund : a very handsome woman, dressed as coquettishly as her widow's weeds allowed. Her face was beautiful as to form and colouring, but its free and vain expression spoiled it. Every glance of her coal-black eye, every movement of her head and hands, every word that fell from her lips, was a purposed display of her charms, a demand for admiration. Sir Edmund need not have cautioned me to keep heart-whole. One so vain and foolish would repel rather than attract me, even though gifted with beauty rarely accorded to woman. A Jezebel? Yes, I agreed with him : a very Jezebel.

"I have the honour of speaking to Mr. Strange? Charles Strange, as I have heard Mr. Brightman call you," she said, with a smile of fascination.

"Yes, I am Charles Strange. What can I do for you, madam?"

"Will you promise to do what I have come to ask you?"

The more she spoke, the less I liked her. I am naturally frank in manner, but I grew reserved with her. "I cannot make a promise, without knowing its nature, Lady Clavering."

She picked up her long jet chain, and twirled it about in her fingers. "What a frightfully sudden death Mr. Brightman's has been," she resumed. "Did he lie ill at all?"

"No. He died suddenly, as he was sitting at his desk. And to render it still more painful, no one was with him."

"I read the account in this morning's paper, and came up at once to see you," resumed Lady Clavering. "He was my husband's confidential adviser. Were you in his confidence also?"

I presumed that she meant Mr. Brightman's, and answered accordingly. "Partially so."

"You are aware how very unjustly my poor childish husband strove to will away his property. Of course the will cannot be allowed to stand. At the time of Sir Ralph's funeral, I informed Mr. Brightman that I should take some steps to assert my rights, and I wished him to be my solicitor in the matter. But no: he refused; and went over to the enemy, Edmund Clavering."

"We were solicitors to Mr. Edmund Clavering before he came into the title."

"Mr. Brightman was; you never did anything for him," she hastily interrupted; "therefore no obligation can lie on you to act for him now. I want you to act for me, and I have come all this way to request you to do so."

"I cannot do so, Lady Clavering. I have seen Sir Edmund since Mr. Brightman's death, and have undertaken to carry on his business."

"Seen Sir Edmund since Mr. Brightman's death!"

"I have indeed."

She threw herself back in her chair, and looked at me from under her vain eyelids. "Leave him, Mr. Strange; you can easily make an excuse, if you will. Mr. Brightman held all my husband's papers, knew all about his property, and no one is so fitted to act for me as you, his partner. I will make it worth your while."

"What you suggest is impossible, Lady Clavering. We are enlisted in the interests—I speak professionally—of the other side, and have already advised with Sir Edmund as to the steps to be taken in the suit you purpose to enter against him. To leave him for you, after doing so, would be dishonourable and impossible."

She shot another glance at me from those mischievous eyes. "I will make it well worth your while, I repeat, Mr. Strange."

I could look mischievous too, if I pleased; perhaps did on occasion; but she could read nothing in my gaze then, as it met hers, that was not sober as old Time.

"I can only repeat my answer, Lady Clavering."

Not a word spoke she; only made play with her eyes. Did the woman mean to subdue me? Her gaze dropped.

"I have heard Mr. Brightman speak of Charles Strange not only as a thorough lawyer, but as a *gentleman*; very fond of the world's vanities."

"Not very fond, Lady Clavering. Joining in them occasionally, in proper time and place."

"I met you once at a large evening party. It was at old Judge Tartar's," she ran on.

"Indeed!" I answered, not remembering it.

"It was before I married Sir Ralph. You came in with your relative, Sergeant Stillingfar. What a charming man he is! I heard you tell someone you had just come down from Oxford. *Won't* you act for me, Mr. Strange?"

"Indeed, it does not lie in my power."

"Well, I did not think a gentleman"—with another stress upon the word—"would have refused to act on my behalf."

"Lady Clavering must perceive that I have no alternative."

"Who is Edmund Clavering that he should be preferred to me?" she demanded with some vehemence.

"Nay, Lady Clavering, circumstances compel the preference."

A silence ensued, and I glanced at my watch—the lawyer's hint. She did not take it.

"Can you tell me whether, amidst the papers Mr. Brightman held belonging to Sir Ralph, there are any letters of mine?"

"I cannot say."

"Some of my letters, to Sir Ralph and others, are missing, and I think they must have got amongst the papers by mistake. Will you look?"

"I will take an early opportunity of doing so."

"Oh, but I mean now. I want them. Why cannot you search now?"

I did not tell her why. In the first place, most of the Clavering papers were in the room where Mr. Brightman was lying—and there were other reasons also.

"I cannot spare the time, Lady Clavering: I have an appointment out of doors which I must keep. I will search for you in a day or two. But, should any letters of yours be here—of which I assure you I am ignorant—you will pardon my intimating that it may not be expedient to give them up."

"What do you mean? Why not?"

"Should they bear at all upon the cause at issue between you and Sir Edmund Clavering——"

"But they don't," she interrupted.

"Then, if they do not, I shall be happy to enclose them to you."

"It is of the utmost consequence to me that I should regain possession of them," she said, with suppressed agitation.

"And, if possible, you shall do so." I rose as I spoke, and waited for her to rise. She did so, but advanced to the window and pulled the blind aside.

"My carriage is not back yet, Mr. Strange. A friend who came up with me has gone to do a commission for herself. It will be here in a few minutes. I suppose I can wait."

I begged her to remain as long as she pleased, but to excuse me for I was already behind time. She drew up the blind a little and sat down at the window as I left her.

After giving some directions to Lennard, I hastened to keep my appointment, which was at the Temple with a chamber-counsel.

The interview lasted about twenty minutes. As I turned into Essex Street again, Lady Clavering's carriage was bowling up it. I raised my hat, and she bowed to me, leaning before another lady, who sat with her, but she looked white and frightened. What had gone with her brilliant colour? At the door, when I reached it, stood the clerks, Lennard amongst them, some with a laugh on their countenances, some looking as white and scared as Lady Clavering.

"Why, what is this?" I exclaimed.

They went back to their desks, and Lennard explained.

"You must have seen Lady Clavering's carriage," he began.

"Yes."

"Just before it came for her, cries and shrieks were heard above; startling shrieks, terrifying us all. We hastened up with one accord, and found that Lady Clavering ——"

"Well?" I impatiently cried, looking at Lennard.

"Had gone into the next room, and seen Mr. Brightman," he whispered. "It took three of us to hold her, and it ended with hysterics. Leah came flying from the kitchen, took off her bonnet, and brought some water."

I was sorry to hear it; sorry that any woman should have been exposed to so unpleasant a fright. "But it was her own fault," I said to Lennard. "How could she think of entering a room of which the door was locked?"

"What right had she to attempt to enter it at all, locked or unlocked, I should say, Mr. Strange," returned Lennard severely. "And the best of it was, she laid the blame upon us; asking what business we had to put dead people into public rooms."

"She is a curious sort of woman, I fancy, Lennard."

And the more I thought of her the more curious I found her. The door between the two rooms had been locked, and the key was lying in the corner of the mantelpiece. Lady Clavering must have searched for the key before she could open the door and enter the room.

With what motive had she entered it?

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MISSING WILL.

MR. BRIGHTMAN was buried on the Thursday, and Mr. Sergeant Stillingfar came up from circuit for the funeral. Three or four other gentlemen attended, and myself. It was all done very quietly. After that the will was read.

He had not left as much money as might have been expected. I suppose the rate at which they lived had absorbed it. Nearly the whole of it was vested in trustees, who would pay the interest to Mrs. Brightman until her death, when it would all descend unconditionally to Annabel. If she married again, one half the yearly income at once went to Annabel. To my surprise, I was left executor. Mr. Brightman had never told me so. Of the two executors originally appointed—for the will had been made many years—one had recently died, and Mr. Brightman had inserted my name in his place. That all the work would fall upon my shoulders I knew, for the other executor had become a confirmed invalid.

With regard to our own articles of partnership, provided for by a recent codicil, they were very favourable to me, though somewhat peculiar. If Mr. Brightman died before I was thirty years of age, two-thirds of the net profits of the business were to be paid to Mrs. Brightman for three years; but if I had passed my thirtieth year when he died, only half the profits would go to her. After the first three years, one-third of the profits would be hers for three years more; and then it would all revert to me absolutely.

I wanted some years yet of thirty. But it was a most excellent and lucrative practice. Few men fall into so good a thing when they are still young.

"So there you are, Charles, the head of one of the best professional houses in London," remarked my Uncle Stillingfar, as he took my arm when we were leaving the house. "Rather different from what your fate might have been, had you carried out your wish of going to the Bar. My boy, you may be thankful that you know nothing of the struggles I had to go through."

"Do you still feel quite well and strong, uncle?" I asked, after a bit.

"Yes, I do, Charles. I suppose you think I am growing old. But I believe I am more capable of work than are many of my juniors who are now on circuit with me. With a sound constitution, never played with, and a temperate way of life, we retain our energies, by God's blessing, to an older age than mine."

That was no doubt true. True also that he must be making heaps of money. I wondered what he meant to do with it. He had been very liberal to me as long as I needed help, but that time was over.

The sad week passed away. On the following Monday I set to

professional business in earnest : the previous week had been much given to matters not professional. One of the first things to be attended to was to prove the will of Sir Ralph Clavering, and, in the course of the morning, I unlocked the iron safe in the front room to get it. Nothing was ever placed in that safe but wills and title-deeds, and these were never placed anywhere else. But where this particular will was hiding itself, I could not tell, for I turned over every paper the place contained without coming to it. "More haste less speed," cried I to myself, for I had been doing it in a hurry. "I must have overlooked it."

So I began again and went through the papers carefully, paper by paper. I had not overlooked it, for Sir Ralph's will was certainly not there.

Now, was I awake or dreaming ? Was there a fairy in the walls to remove things, or was the house bewitched ?—or what was it ? I went and examined the Clavering papers, which were in Mr. Brightman's desk in the adjoining room—my room, which had been cleaned and put straight again. But the will was not amongst them. I searched other drawers and desks in vain. Then I called up Lennard.

"Do you know anything of Sir Ralph Clavering's will ? I cannot find it."

"It must be in the safe," he replied.

"It is not in the safe. Lennard, this is very strange : first that bag of money, and now the will."

"Oh, but it cannot be," returned Lennard, after a pause. "That the gold went, appears to be too plain, but who would take a will ? Money might be a temptation, if any stranger did enter Mr. Brightman's room that night, but —"

"It has been proved, almost beyond doubt, that no one entered, and yet the money went. Lennard, there's something not canny at work in the house, as the Scotch say."

"Do not think it, Mr. Strange," he replied warmly. "The gold appears to have gone in some mysterious manner, but the will cannot be gone. Depend upon it, it is in the safe."

I had a great respect for Lennard's judgment, but I had as great confidence in my own eyesight. I unlocked the safe again, and, taking out the parchments, one by one, handed them to Lennard, that he might read their titles. "There," said I, when we had reached the last ; "is the will amongst them ?"

Lennard's face had turned grave. "This is very extraordinary," he exclaimed. "Mr. Brightman would not put it anywhere else."

"He never put a will up in any other place but this since I have been with him, Lennard ; and I myself saw him put it in ; held the light for him : it was in the evening of last Tuesday week ; after he came back from Sir Ralph's funeral. It has gone after the gold."

"No, no," he cried, almost in agitation ; "it has not, it has not : I will never believe it."

One very slight hope came to me. Mr. Brightman might have given it into the custody of Sir Edmund Clavering. But then, Sir Edmund would surely have said so, when he spoke to me about proving the will. The loss of the money was nothing to this, for that had been easily replaced, and there was an end of the matter; but this loss could not be replaced, and there was no knowing what the end would be. It might be little short of ruin to Sir Edmund Clavering, and nothing short of ruin to me: for who would continue to employ a firm liable to lose wills?

I was greatly occupied that day, but the missing will lay upon me like a nightmare, and I forced time for a dash up to Sir Edmund Clavering's hotel in the afternoon, bribing the cabman to double speed. By good luck, I found Sir Edmund in, and inquired if he held possession of the will.

"Mr. Brightman holds the will," he replied. "Held, I should say: I cannot yet speak of him in the past tense, you see. He took it home with him after Sir Ralph's funeral."

"I know he brought it home, Sir Edmund; but I thought it possible he might since then have given it into your possession. I hoped he had, for I cannot find the will. I have searched for it everywhere."

"Not find the will!" he echoed. "Perhaps you have looked in every place but the right one," he added, with a slight laugh. "I can tell you where it is."

"Where?"

"In the iron safe in Mr. Brightman's room."

"It was placed there: we never put wills anywhere else; never: but it is not there now. May I ask how you knew it was there, Sir Edmund?"

"Because on the day but one following the funeral I came to town and had an interview with Mr. Brightman in his room. It was on the Thursday. Perhaps you remember that I was with him that day?"

"Quite well."

"During our consultation we differed in opinion as to a certain clause in the will, and Mr. Brightman took it out of the safe to convince me. He was right, and I was wrong: as, indeed, I might have known, considering that he had made the will. He put it back into the safe at once and locked it up. When are you going to prove the will? It ought to be done now."

"I was going to set about it this very day; but, as I say, I cannot find the will."

"It must be easy enough to find a big parchment like that. If not in the safe, Mr. Brightman must have put it elsewhere. Look in all his pigeon-holes and places."

"I have looked: I have looked everywhere." Just as I looked some days before for the bag of sovereigns, I mentally added.

But Sir Edmund Clavering was determined to treat the matter lightly: he evidently attached no importance to it whatever, believing that Mr. Brightman had only changed its place.

I went home again, feeling as uncomfortable as I had ever felt in my life. An undefined idea, a doubt, had flashed into my mind whilst I had been talking to Lennard. Imagination is quicker with me, I know, than with many people; and the moment a thing puzzles me, I must dive into its why and wherefore: its various bearings and phases, probable and improbable, natural and unnatural. This doubt: which I had driven away at the time; had been driving away during my gallop to Sir Edmund's, and whilst I was conversing with him: now grew into suspicion.

Let me explain how I arrived at this suspicion. When I found the will had disappeared from the safe; when I searched and searched in vain, I could only come to the conclusion that it had been stolen. But why was it taken? From what motive? Why should that one particular parchment be abstracted, and the others left? Obviously, it could only have been from interested motives. Now, who had an interest in getting possession of the will—so that it might not be proved and acted upon? Only one person in the whole world—Lady Clavering. And Lady Clavering had been alone in the room where the safe was for nearly half an hour!

If she had obtained possession of the will, there was farewell to our ever getting it again. I saw through her character at that first interview: she was a woman absolutely without scruple.

But, how could she have got at it? Even supposing she knew the will was in the iron safe, she could not have opened it without the key; and how could she have obtained the key? Again—if Lady Clavering were the guilty party, what became of my very natural suspicions that the will and the gold were both taken by the same hand? And with the gold Lady Clavering could have had nothing to do. Look at it as I would, perplexities arose; points difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile.

Lennard met me in the passage on my return. "Is it all right? Has Sir Edmund got it, sir?"

"No, no; I told you it was a forlorn hope. Come upstairs, Lennard. Sir Edmund has not the will," I continued, as we entered the front room. "He says that when he was here last Thursday week, Mr. Brightman had occasion to refer to the will, took it from the safe and put it back again. Therefore it is since that period that the theft has taken place."

"Can you really look upon it as *stolen*?" Lennard uttered, with emphasis. "Who would steal so valueless a thing as a will?"

"Not valueless to everyone."

"No one in the house would do such a thing. You have a suspicion?" he added.

"Yes, I have, Lennard."

He began to pace the room. Lennard was, in truth, completely upset by this loss. "Of whom?" he presently jerked out. "Surely not of Leah!"

"Of Leah! Oh, no."

"I fancied you suspected her in the matter of the money. I feel sure she was innocent."

"So do I. Leah no more took the money than you or I did, Lennard. And what should she want with the will? If I made her a present of all the wills in the safe, she would only light her fires with them, as useless lumber. Try again."

But he only shook his head. "I cannot catch your drift, sir."

"To all persons, two excepted, the will would be as useless as to Leah. One of those two is Sir Edmund; and he has it not: the other is Lady Clavering."

"But surely you cannot suspect her!" exclaimed Lennard. "You cannot suspect Lady Clavering!"

"To say that I suspect her would perhaps be too strong a word, Lennard. If my doubts rest upon her at all, it is because she is the only person who could have an interest in getting possession of the will: and she is the only stranger, as far as I can recollect, who has been alone in this room sufficiently long to take it from the safe."

Lennard was incredulous. "But she had not the key of the safe. She could not have opened it without it."

"I know—I see the improbabilities that encompass my doubts: but I can think of nothing else."

"Where was the key of the safe?" asked Lennard.

"In that back room; and in Mr. Brightman's deep drawer; the drawer from which the gold was taken," was my grave answer. "And she could not have got at it without—without passing him."

Lennard's face grew hot.

"And the key of that drawer was here, in my own pocket, on the bunch." I took out the bunch of keys as I spoke—Mr. Brightman's bunch until within a few days—and shook it before him.

"What mystery has come over the house, about keys, and locks, and things disappearing?" Lennard murmured, as a man bewildered.

"Lennard, it is the question I am asking myself."

"She could never have gone in there and passed him; and stood there while she got the key. A young and beautiful woman like Lady Clavering! Sir, it would be unnatural."

"No more unnatural for beauty than for ugliness, Lennard. Unnatural for most women, though, whether pretty or plain."

"But how could she have divined that the key of the safe was in that drawer, or in that room?" urged Lennard. "For the matter of that, how could she have known that the will was in the safe?"

Truly the affair presented grave perplexities. "One curious part of it is that she should have called you up with her screams, Len-

nard," I remarked. "If she had only that moment opened the door, and seen—what frightened her, she could not have been already in the room, hunting for the key. Were the screams assumed? Was it all a piece of acting?"

"It would take a subtle actress to counterfeit her terror," replied Lennard; "and the best actress breathing could not have assumed her ghastly look. No, Mr. Strange, I believe what she said was the fact: that, weary of waiting for her carriage, she had walked about the room; then opened the door, and passed into the other without a thought, except that of distracting her ennui."

"She must have looked about for the key of the door, mind you, Lennard."

A man has rarely been placed in a more disagreeable predicament than I felt to be in then. It was of no use temporising with the matter: I could only meet it boldly, and I sent that evening for Sir Edmund Clavering, and laid it before him. I told him of Lady Clavering's visit, and hinted at the doubt which had forced itself on my mind. Sir Edmund jumped to the conclusion (and into a passion at the same time) that she was the culprit, and declared he would apply for a warrant at Bow Street on the morrow, to take her into custody. With extreme difficulty I got him to hear reason against anything of the sort.

Lennard, who had remained, came round to Sir Edmund's opinion that it must inevitably have been Lady Clavering. Failing her, no shadow of suspicion could attach itself to anyone else, sift and search into the matter as we would.

"But neither was there as to the gold," was my rejoinder.

Then after they were gone, and I sat by the fire in the front room, and went over the details dispassionately and carefully, and lay awake the best part of the night, going over them still, my suspicions of Lady Clavering lessened, and I arrived at the conclusion that they were too improbable to be well founded.

Nevertheless, I intended to pursue the course I had decided on: and that was to call upon her. She, like Sir Edmund, was now staying in London, at an hotel. Not to accuse her, but to see if I could not, indirectly, make out something that would confirm or dissipate my suspicion.

I went up in the course of the morning. Lady Clavering was sitting alone, her widow's cap on the sofa beside her. She hurried it on to her head, when the waiter announced me.

"It is so hot and ugly," she exclaimed, in tones of excuse; "I sit without it when I am alone. So you have condescended to return my visit, Mr. Strange. I thought you gentlemen of the law took refuge in your plea of occupation to ignore etiquette."

"Indeed it is not out of deference to etiquette that I have called upon you to-day, Lady Clavering, but ——"

"You have thought better of your refusal: you have come to say

you will undertake my business!" she interrupted, eyes and looks full of eagerness.

"Nor yet that," I was forced to reply, though, in truth, I should have been glad to conciliate her. "I am sure you will find many an advocate quite as efficient as I should be. The day you were at our house, did you happen to see ——"

"Mr. Strange, I must beg you, as a gentleman, not to allude to what I saw," she interposed, in tones of alarm. "I think it was inexcusable, on your part, not to have informed me what was in the next room."

"Pardon me, Lady Clavering; it would have been an unnecessary and unpleasant piece of information to volunteer: for how could I possibly foresee that you would be likely to enter that room?" I might have added—look for the key, unlock it, and go into it.

"I never saw a dead person in my life," she rejoined; "not even my husband; and I shall not easily recover from the shock. I would give anything rather than have been exposed to it."

"And so would I, and I shall always regret it," was my warm apology.

"Then why do you introduce the subject?"

"I did not intend to allude to that; but to your having sat in the front room I must allude; and I know you will excuse my asking you the question I am about to put to you. Did you happen to see a parchment lying in that front room: on the table, or the side-tables, or—anywhere, in short? We have missed one: and if you chanced to have noticed it, it would be a great assistance to us, as a proof that we need not carry our researches further back than that day."

"I don't remember that I saw any parchment," she carelessly rejoined. "I saw some papers, tied round with pink tape, on the table; I did not notice them particularly. I pray you not to make me think about that afternoon, or you will have me in hysterics again."

"It is not possible—your ladyship will pardon me—that it can have caught your dress in any way, and so have been carried down stairs and out of the house, and—perhaps—lost in the street?" I persisted slowly, looking at her.

Looking at her: but I could detect no emotion on her face; no drooping of the eye; no rise or fall of colour, such as one, guilty, would have been likely to display. She appeared to take my question literally, and to see nothing beyond it.

"I cannot tell anything about it, Mr. Strange. Had my dress been covered with parchments, I was in too much terror to notice them. Your clerks would be more able to answer you than I, for they had to assist me down to my carriage. But how should a parchment become attached to a lady's dress?" she added, shaking out the folds of her ample skirts. "The crape is quite soft, you perceive. Touch it."

"Quite so," I assented, advancing for a half moment the extreme tip of my forefinger.

"You will take a glass of wine? Now don't say no. Why can't you be sociable?"

"Not any wine, thank you," I answered with a laugh. "We lawyers have to keep our heads clear, Lady Clavering: we should not do that if we took wine in the day-time."

"Sit still, pray. You have scarcely been here five minutes. I want to speak to you, too, upon a matter of business."

So I resumed my seat, and waited. She was looking at me very earnestly.

"It is about those missing letters of mine. Have you searched for them, Mr. Strange?"

"Partially. I do not think we hold any. There are none amongst the Clavering papers."

"Why do you say 'partially?'" she questioned.

"I have not had time to search amongst the packets of letters in Mr. Brightman's cupboards and places. But I think if there were any of your letters in our possession they would have been with the Clavering papers."

Her gaze again sought mine for a moment, and then faded to vacancy. "I wonder if he burnt them?" she dreamily uttered.

"Who? Mr. Brightman?"

"No; my husband. You must look *everywhere*, Mr. Strange. If those letters are in existence, I must have them. You will look?"

"Certainly I will."

"I shall remain in town until I hear from you. You *will* go, then!"

"One more question ere I do go, Lady Clavering. Have you positively no recollection of seeing this lost parchment?"

She looked surprised at my pertinacity. "If I had, I should say so. I do not think I saw anything of the sort. But if I had seen it, the subsequent fright would have taken it clean out of my memory."

So I wished her good morning and departed. "It is not Lady Clavering," I exclaimed to Lennard, when I reached home.

"Are you sure of that, Mr. Strange?"

"I think so. I judge by her manner: it is only consistent with perfect innocence. In truth, Lennard, I begin to see that I was foolish to have doubted her at all, the circumstances surrounding it are so intensely improbable."

And yet, even while I spoke, something of the suspicion crept into my mind again. So prone to inconsistency is the human heart.

(To be continued.)

THE LADIES' BATH.

THE desire for Arcadian simplicity of life would of itself lure only the very few ; but to prove that a veritable Medea's Cauldron exists in the midst of some absolute nineteenth century Arcadia is to entice many of the gentler sex to endure the one for the sake of the other.

If Sir Philip Sidney could have located his Arcadia, as I can the one of which I am about to tell you ; and if he could have placed therein what kind nature has given to mine—a rejuvenating fountain, and universal beauty restorer—there is no doubt it would have been colonised far more speedily than was even the Eldorado of that date. Then why has not my Arcadia been already over-run ? And why are not its English visitors every summer more plentiful than bees in a clover field ? For the simple reason that the place is so little known to the generality of English health-seekers.

It is hidden away in a richly wooded nook of the Taunus Mountains, just above the famous Rhine-gau ; so altogether out of the world, so far from the beaten track of tourists and pleasure-seekers, that the snort of the engine is unknown there, and you must drive several miles from Eltville-on-the-Rhine in order to reach it.

This is the shortest route, but if you wish to see more of the high table-land of this little Duchy of Nassau, and do not object to a drive of some length, but rich in interest, you may reach it from Ems, which will take nearly the whole day ; or from Wiesbaden, in which case you must cross one of the wooded heights of the Taunus Mountains, and a lovelier drive cannot be imagined. I have approached it by all three routes, and know well the charms of each.

Not to be misleading, I must state that the modern name of this sylvan retreat is not Arcadia, but Schlangenbad—the Serpents' Bath ; or, as it is very frequently called on account of one special effect of the application of the waters, the Ladies' Bath. The first connection between woman and the snake, as we know, was not a very happy one ; but here the snakes seem to be bent upon retrieving their bad character, and upon becoming a blessing instead of a bane ; for the popular belief for ages was that the snakes which abound in the vicinity of the springs—pretty, harmless creatures—imparted some mysterious quality to the waters.

But modern science, that cruel destroyer of all pretty myths and fancies, declares their effect to be due to the fact—as one of the physicians of Schlangenbad kindly writes me—that “the skin absorbs almost all of the elements held in solution by the water.” The purity of the Schlangenbad water is extreme. It has a bluish tint, is absolutely free from smell, and very soft to the touch.

The first regular bathing-house was built about the middle of the seventeenth century. A little later the famous springs were in the possession of the Landgraves of Hesse, one of whom built the Oberes Kur-Haus. Then the Elector of Mainz built the Nassauer-Hof, the present restaurant for all the royal houses. So between the Electors and Landgraves the green little valley became both lively and fashionable. Long avenues of hornbeam trees were planted, and princes, knights and ladies bathed, revelled and enjoyed themselves.

In 1816 it passed into the possession of the Dukes of Nassau ; and again, in 1866, it changed hands, becoming the property of the Prussian crown.

The consequence of this royal monopoly is that almost everything is regulated by an official tariff. Even the very laundresses have their prices fixed for them, and may not, even if they would, overcharge. One cannot help wishing that the same system of things existed in our own watering-places, where the visitors are altogether at the mercy of extortionate lodging-house keepers and others. Here, in this happy valley, the chaise drivers, and even the donkey-men, are obliged to produce their tax-sheet on demand. The rooms in the Royal Bathing Establishment have their fixed price in the same way (as also, so I am informed, have the private houses), and the sum of each, on a little enamelled medallion, is affixed above every door.

As compared with our own sea-side resorts, the prices for rooms are moderate. In the hope of being able to advise those amongst my country-folk who may be tempted to try Schlangenbad for themselves in the coming season, I went through all the buildings of the Royal Establishment, and inspected the rooms, baths, etc.

Be it remembered that the whole habits of life here are different from our own : a sitting-room is a luxury, and often a very superfluous one ; never a necessity. One dines and sups in the public room ; and morning and afternoon coffee or tea are served in one's own room, which is as much a sitting as a sleeping-room ; or on one or other of the terraces, or in the shady nooks in gardens and shrubberies.

In the Nassauer-Hof the prices of bedrooms vary from one to six marks a day ; in the other houses from one to eighteen marks. In the Oberes is a quaintly old-fashioned, but most comfortable suite of rooms, with staircase leading down to a private bath. These are let *en suite* for seventeen marks a day, and are known as the Prince's Apartments.

The Mittleres is the largest of the royal houses. It is three stories high, and the range of eighteen baths on the lower floor are white-tiled and most luxurious. On the first floor are large and lofty salons with balconies to the windows ; the salons are from eight to ten marks per day, the bedrooms *en suite*, three marks. The upper floors are proportionately cheaper. In the Unteres is the magnificent suite of rooms occupied by the aged Empress of Germany last year ;

and very princely rooms they are, with lovely views of the green, smiling valley, and lofty wooded heights from the balconied windows. Here are twenty-one baths luxuriously fitted. Besides these houses there is a little Swiss chalet, called the Schweitzerhaus, standing in small grounds by itself, quite idyllic in its picturesqueness. It contains eight doll-like rooms, and an outside staircase running up under its wide eaves. This is let entire for fifteen marks a day, and affords charming accommodation for a family.

There is other accommodation in the valley for visitors besides that which the Royal Establishment provides. Hotels and private houses where the terms are lower still; but as in my visits to Schlangenbad I have always stayed in one or other of the Kur-houses, I cannot speak definitely of these.

One must not suppose that the sole, or even the chief use of the waters of the Schlangenbad is as a cosmetic, although thousands of bottles of it go yearly to every capital in Europe to be used as a toilet article. As all the physicians of the place are agreed, its effect upon the skin is such as to well merit the name which has been bestowed upon it—the Beauty Bath: but it possesses other and even more marked properties.

“If his brain should require calming, his nerves soothing, and his skin softening, let him glide onward to Schlangenbad,” said a genial writer of a quarter of a century ago. And so, with equal appropriateness, it has earned a right to be called *Nervenbad* also. And there are other diseases still, too numerous to mention, that may be greatly ameliorated, if not absolutely cured, by the simple, health-giving properties that exist in both air and water in this secluded and delightful spot. Here is the summing up of the effects of the baths by one qualified by long experience to speak upon the subject:

“They calm and strengthen the nervous system, regulate the circulation of the blood, improve the functions of the skin, promote gently the interchange of matter, and stimulate the agency of the absorbing vessels.” But they need to be judiciously and carefully used and administered, under the care and advice of physicians whose time and study have been given to their application; and it would be foolish for anyone to go to Schlangenbad and bathe and drink haphazard.

There is no country in the world surely that possesses more tired brain-workers, who need just such a tranquillising and renovating influence as is to be found in perfection here, than old England does at the present time. And yet the English people I met during my two months' sojourn of last summer might almost be counted on my fingers.

The reason for this is that most patients who need just such restoratives, go abroad under the direction of their doctor or physician: and to the faculty, Schlangenbad, and its pure, life-giving air, its woody heights, its vast surrounding tracts of forest land, and its

healing waters, is a *terra incognita*. And my reason for writing about its beauties and its virtues at all is to stimulate those who need so sorely just what it can give: to seek, and to inquire for themselves.

To tell of its lonely woods, its interminable paths through the forest, its pastoral simplicity of life, its delicious baths, would need a pen steeped in all the language of all the poets. So balmy is the air that you may spend the whole day out-of-doors, from early morning to late night, keeping up a perpetual pic-nic. I often declared, laughingly, that it was a mere farce to have engaged even so much as a bedroom, that all one *needed* was a hammock slung in one of the green glades, out of the way of the snakes, with the trickle of a streamlet for a lullaby.

Those who are satisfied with simple pleasures, who can "think themselves happy when they are quiet and clean," and who love to hold converse with Nature in her holiest sanctuaries, will find this a paradise indeed. But those who cannot be happy without excitement and gaiety had better go elsewhere, nor seek to be made wise with a wisdom they could not comprehend.

Of the neighbourhood of Schlungenbad, of the many walks, rides and drives, I have no space to say one word, and yet they merit a great many. Just one word about the baths themselves, and then I have done.

Are you tired with the strain and stress of this world's toil and competition? Are you longing, with throbbing pulse and quivering nerves, for freedom for awhile from the galling harness of some daily worry? Have you accomplished satisfactorily some task that has taxed your powers to the utmost, and left you jaded and weak, wondering vaguely whence will come the recuperative force to fit you in due time for another undertaking? And do you long for the sleep that knows no waking, and the strength that can never become weakness that you trust will be yours when you enter the unseen land?

Believe me, you can find no nearer approach to the rest you crave than in the luxury afforded by the Serpents' Bath. As its velvet waters cover your tired limbs, all the cares of this often bitter, and generally weary, world, slip away from you. Unconsciously you begin to quote the Lotus Song, "There is no joy but calm." And, soft as the touch of the water is to your fingers, even so soothing is its effect upon your mind. The throbbing of your pulses subsides, the quivering nerves relax, your faith revives, and it does not take long to convince you that you will soon be able to take up your daily task once more, and faithfully perform it to the end.

M. S.

MRS. FAIRLEIGH'S DREAM.

An Incident in Real Life.

I.

YOU want to know whether I believe in dreams? You think that because I have lived through a longer term than is given to most, I must needs have so much the more experience, and am all the more able to judge. Well, I am not so sure of that. For it seems to me that the present generation have come to live so fast, learn so fast, and think so fast, that their years have expanded to double the value of former times. So that two score of the present day may fairly represent my own person, in the matter of wisdom and experience.

But as to dreams, I hardly like to express an opinion. I know all you would say in favour of dreams, on the authority of Holy Writ. There is Jacob's ladder. There is Pharaoh's dream. There is Daniel's dream; and Joseph and Mary's dream when they were warned to take the infant Jesus into Egypt. And there are others, so many and so striking, that we feel they must have been inspired by a special Providence and for a special purpose.

I have known one who dreamed of an absent brother drowning. He saw him fall over the ship's side into calm water, in mid ocean. He heard the drowning man's cry for help. But no alarm was given, no rope thrown to save him. The ship sailed on unheeding, and the waters closed over the drowning man for ever.

When the ship came to port, it told of the disappearance of one of the passengers on such a night, at such a date, corresponding exactly with that on which the dream was dreamed. But I now ask: What law of nature did this warning obey? If no established law, and it was just an especial interposition of Providence, what purpose did it work out? It could not bring back the dead man to life; nor could that death benefit the living brother one jot; neither could it serve to bring the negligent watch to justice; for no dream would ever be taken as witness in a court of law.

I remember one case, however, when a fearful warning was given in a dream; and being left unheeded, its fulfilment came all too soon, all too true, and all too fatally to the people concerned.

People say it is a great disadvantage to marry late and have children late. I am not so sure of that. My own mother married late, and I am the offspring of what might be termed her old age; while she again was the youngest of ten children, which shows her to have been born a hundred years ago. And I, such as I am, have consequently been thrown into such close contact with the people of the past, that I have gathered their traditions and their teachings fresh from the source—all vivid as life.

This is to tell you that my mother knew the three Miss Gunnings, and often spoke of them to me. One of these ladies married, first the Duke of Hamilton, and afterwards the Duke of Argyle : therefore she was the ancestress of the present Lord Lorne. Another married the Earl of Coventry ; and a third, the most beautiful of the three, died young. Her mother used to say that, had she lived, her beauty would have set the world on fire.

Besides these three sisters, there was a brother, who stood as handsome among men as they did among women. Through the interest of his brother-in-law, he was drafted into the army, and in an incredibly short space of time, he rose from grade to grade to the rank of general. But, unlike his sisters, his marriage was not at all fortunate. His wife was always doing something to bring him into trouble, and he could teach her neither through her reason nor her heart, for she had none. Two little girls were born of this union ; whom the mother pronounced a bore and sent out to nurse.

The youngest of these, however, was in for luck. A lady happening to pass the nurse's cottage while the child was playing at the door, took a fancy to her, and soon after obtained General Gunning's consent and approval to adopt the nursling altogether. This was Mrs. Fairleigh, a widow lady who had a son in India but no immediate relative near.

The little Helen was, at this time, nothing but a flaxen-haired, rosy-cheeked child ; but as she grew up, her nature, under the kindly influence of her adopted mother, expanded into rare loveliness of form. She became as remarkable for her fresh, pretty looks, as for a most amiable disposition and womanly heart.

The eldest little girl did not thrive so well. She grew up under no genial influence, no motherly care. She knew she was not looked after, and she looked after no one in her turn. She was plain, like her mother ; but like her mother she could boast of a beautiful hand and arm : a great thing in those days, when it was the fashion to go bare-necked and bare-armed from breakfast till supper.

She and her mother would gamble and racket from one week's end to the other, to the discomfiture of General Gunning, who complained that he had no home. It was the way of fashionable life in those days ; but General Gunning could not favour it, and at last he went to Italy, where he died.

Eventually, Miss Gunning married a cousin of my mother's ; that Major Plunkett who took part in the rebellion of '98 ; and, marching upon Dublin with a thousand men under his command, was defeated, and condemned by Lord Castlereagh to perpetual exile.

He was one of the Dunsany Plunketts. He came to London and paid his court to Miss Gunning. He thought she had money, and she thought he had money ; and, mutually deceiving one another, the marriage took place. It was through him my mother came to know

the Gunnings, and to be present when the dream was related which forms the subject of my theme.

Meanwhile, the old possessor of Fairleigh Manor died; and the next heir being the son of Mrs. Fairleigh, he was immediately summoned from India to take possession of his inheritance. I need not repeat the old story. Helen appeared before the Major in all the bloom of her seventeen summers; a wood nymph as he called her, a fairy, an angel; and to this wood nymph, this fairy, this angel, he offered his hand and heart.

Helen was very fortunate in her marriage. She had all that could make life happy. A husband who adored her, and little children who played about her like the cherubs they were; and she spent her days in the country, devoting herself to them, to her home, and to the tenants of her domain. The poor blessed her as she passed; and when at eventide she went forth, leaning on the arm of her stalwart warrior husband, to wander among the shades and glades of the manor, it was a sight people went out of their way to see.

In an evil hour Mrs. Plunkett, who had hitherto never cared for her sister, now fell into some great money trouble, and, put to her wits' end, she applied to her brother-in-law for help. He, in the generosity of his heart, not only presented her with the relief she sought, but invited her down on a visit to his country seat.

Mrs. Plunkett came, and stayed a long time. For some months she made quite a home of her sister's place, and invited down a friend of hers, not of the most serious type: a certain Lady Rich, who had earned celebrity in the fashionable world by presenting new beauties at court every season. What with flattery, persuasion, importunity and prayer, they both—that is, Mrs. Plunkett and Lady Rich—extracted from the Major a promise that he would bring his wife to London the following season.

Major Fairleigh did not do his duty when he, with his eyes open, delivered over his beautiful innocent wife to the company of as disreputable a set as ever danced a minuet at a court ball.

My mother used to say that it was the most pitiable thing in the world to see how that beautiful, modest, good, simple mistress of Fairleigh Manor got transformed into a bedizened, painted creature; sliding down headlong the way to perdition, like many another in that wicked circle.

II.

THERE was to be a grand ball given in honour of the belle of the season, the beautiful Mrs. Fairleigh. It was to be got up with unusual splendour; and it was even said that possibly Royalty might look in. Princes of the blood would surely be there, and many Highnesses of foreign Courts.

Mrs. Fairleigh of course was anxious to appear in appropriate style; and Lady Rich, who had introduced her at Court, now undertook to

direct her toilette. The most fashionable jewellers brought their merchandise to lay before the queen of the day. Dressmakers petitioned to have a hand in her furbelows, and the most exquisite fancies were invented to win her favour and her choice. At last it began to try her nerves.

"They do bore me so!" she cried in complaint to Lady Rich. "They pester me all day long. I wish they would have done. I have no sooner fixed on one thing than another more beautiful still is set before me! It keeps me in a perpetual fever of excitement. I can't sleep! I never get a wink of sleep now, and I shall never be fit for the ball!"

Lady Rich was a little frightened when she heard her speak thus, so she sent for the family physician, who administered a sleeping-potion to the languishing belle. This was the evening before the ball. Helen slept some hours profoundly, but in the dead of night she awoke.

Great drops of perspiration hung about her forehead; she shook from head to foot, yet could not rise; she could not cry for help; she could not even reach the bell-rope which hung at the head of her bed; and she lay thus in powerless agony till morning, when the maid appeared with the usual cup of tea: but her hand was even then so unsteady that before she could bring it to her lips it was all spilt.

To the maid's question as to whether she did not feel well, she only shed silent tears that coursed down her cheeks one after another. But not a word passed her lips.

There was whispering in the servants' hall that morning, and sighs and lamentations; for the master of the house was out of town, and the domestics were at their wits' ends to know what they should do.

Someone suggested to send for Mrs. Plunkett as the nearest member of the family within call; and the housekeeper herself undertook the charge. But Mrs. Plunkett did not like to be disturbed so early in the day. She called the messenger a fool, and then turned on her side and went to sleep again.

Thus baffled, the housekeeper stepped in next door to speak her troubles to her sister, who was in service there with my mother. The latter, hearing of the dilemma, took coach and went off to Mrs. Gunning, who lived at the other side of the town, and they just arrived in time to see the Doctor turning in also.

They found the belle of the season propped up on pillows and looking not at all her usual self; but mortally ill, pale as death, haggard and discomposed: with a scared look about her eyes as if she had seen a ghost.

The first thing was, of course, to examine what remained of the potion in the glass still on the table. On inspection they were soon satisfied that the liquid was harmless, and could give no possible cause for Mrs. Fairleigh's state.

"We must seek the cause elsewhere," said the man of science. "The lady has had a fright, and a very bad fright too, and I must beg both of you ladies (addressing Mrs. Gunning and my mother) to remain in the room while I try to find out what it could have been."

To do Dr. Harnett justice, he opened the campaign with much caution, and managed so well and so gently that at last he got Mrs. Fairleigh to speak. This was a great gain, seeing that hitherto she had been persistently mute.

"Something has happened in the night," he observed, addressing the patient. "Will you tell me what it was? Did anyone come into your room? Did you hear any noise? Did you see anything?"

At this Helen Fairleigh cried very much, and her voice trembled and choked as she spoke.

"No! it was a dream."

"And what sort of a dream?" asked he, persuasively. "Was it black, blue, red or green? Was it a lion, a tiger, a mad bull or a pussy cat?"

Helen smiled a little; and at last explained that it was a dream to warn her not to go to the ball.

"Just so!" remarked her friend, the Doctor. "Your good angel and I are of the same mind. There must be no more question of this ball. A few days' rest is what you need. A friend, an intimate acquaintance now and then to cheer you up, and you want nothing more. But, meantime, no ball."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when someone knocked at the chamber door, and in swept Lady Rich, with her usual loud, volatile manner, never saying good morning, but dashing into her subject at once.

"Oh, is that you, Doctor Harnett? Where is Helen? What, still in bed! Sleeping beauty in the wood, hey? I have come to look at your dress, dear! Is it come home?"

Mrs. Gunning stood up, stiff as a poker, and answered stern and grave as a judge.

"Mrs. Fairleigh is not going to the ball."

She and Lady Rich did not get on together.

"Indeed! and who decided that?" exclaimed Lady Rich at the top of her voice. Then turning to the Doctor, with daggers in her eyes: "Pray, was it you? I tell you she must go to the ball! And go she should if she were dying," she added, in imperative tones.

The Doctor was no worshipper of Lady Rich. He knew her of old, and they had had many a skirmish before now. Nor was he any the more disposed to bow before her insolent speech.

"Those are hard words to use, madam," he replied; "and I regret to say I must oppose them. I am here as family physician, and I alone have a right to decide on matters pertaining to health. Mrs. Fairleigh cannot stir from here this evening, nor, perhaps, for some evenings to come."

"For some hours to come, you mean!" said the lady, tossing her head and offering battle. "And what, may I ask, is the duty of a doctor, if it is not to enable ladies to go to balls and parties? You gave Helen a sleeping-potion yesterday, and that is what has upset her. Now, do you give her a waking-potion, like a good man, and set her right. I tell you she must go to the ball. I am pledged to it, and she shall go with me," she added, curtsying to emphasize her words.

To which the Doctor, drawing himself up with great dignity, replied: "Be good enough, Lady Rich, to keep within the bounds of good manners! I will not suffer any insinuation from you as to the efficacy of my prescriptions! Please to remember, madam, that I have some care for my reputation." And there was the slightest possible inflection as he spoke the word *my* which she might notice or not, as the humour moved her.

But do you think Lady Rich took offence at these words? Not she! They only provoked her scorn. She laughed at them, and going up to the bed, she asked Mrs. Fairleigh to speak out candidly and say whether it was not the sleeping-potion that upset her.

But the stricken patient shook her head, and eagerly denied it. "It was a dream!" she asserted. "And in that dream I went to the ball and died."

Lady Rich almost danced as she heard these words. She made the room ring with her exclamations.

"A nightmare!" she cried. "Bless my soul, I shall die with laughter! A nightmare! Is that all? Why, I have often had nightmare! The best cure is to go to a ball and dance it off! The remedy, I tell you, is sovereign! Nothing like it. Come with me, Helen, and you shall dance it all away. Yes, Dr. Harnett, you may look at me; but I shall prove a better physician than you!" And then she went off into another peal of laughter.

At this the Doctor, nothing daunted, walked quietly across the room and opened the door.

"Please to take notice," he said, "that I am here by the choice of Major Fairleigh, master of this house—not you, Lady Rich. I cannot allow these altercations to go on in a sick-room. Be good enough to postpone your visit to a fitter moment."

And he held the door open for Lady Rich to pass out. Out she went, quick enough, too, her face all purple with rage. Perhaps she expected Mrs. Gunning would have taken her part, or that Mrs. Fairleigh would have remonstrated. But if she did, she was mistaken.

And yet not vanquished, for she did not leave the house, but locked herself up somewhere until she was sure the Doctor was gone. Then she slipped upstairs, and burst into the room.

The maid was at this moment standing by the bedside, having set down a tray of refreshments on the table near it. Mrs. Fairleigh was taking some wine.

Lady Rich seemed greatly to approve this move, and without offer-

ing the smallest apology for the intrusion, she rattled away as if nothing had happened.

"I am so glad to see you eating; that is what you wanted and what you should have done before, but for that insufferable old quack you had here! Now you begin to look yourself again. Where is your dress, dear Helen? I want to look at it."

"But," pleaded the invalid, "I am not going to the ball! It turns me faint to hear you speak of it."

"Not go to the ball that is given in your honour! And what excuse am I to make for your absence? That you had the nightmare? that you saw a ghost?"

"You can tell them the truth. I am ill!"

"You ill, indeed! I like to hear you say that. Yes, you were a little pale at first, but you are all right now. Your cheeks are coming back to their colour already. And for the rest, were I as mum as the dead, the truth would ooze out through the servants. Would it not, Abigail?" she said, addressing the maid as she was leaving the room.

Abigail smiled, and said she was glad to see her lady looking so well again.

Alas! thus it happened; that partly to justify her own repugnance to attend the dreaded ball, and partly in the hope of winning over Lady Rich to her view—for she dreaded that lady's sarcasms—poor, weak Mrs. Fairleigh took a glass of wine, perhaps two, hesitated, and at last narrated her dream.

She dreamed that she went to the ball—the admired of all admirers. Her partners were princes, and she was surrounded with so much homage, and offered so much incense, that she felt lifted above the ordinary herd of mortals. Flattery that night had ceased to move her.

As the hours wore on, the heat of those crowded rooms became more and more oppressive. Her head began to ache, and the pain increasing, she grew unsteady on her feet. Her partner, perceiving this, took her down to the supper-room to have a glass of wine. But before she could even grasp the proffered cup, she swayed, bent, reeled a little, and fell fainting on the floor.

In the bustle and confusion which followed it was not possible to find her carriage, perhaps it had not come; and after much trouble and anxiety, a hackney coach was procured, into which she was lifted and conveyed home. She was placed on her bed and administered to; physicians were sent for, and friends surrounded her, but she knew her days were numbered and that her end was near.

At last it came, that solemn end; she died. She left the body she had inhabited—she left the earth, and was wafted, she knew not how, to the judgment seat of God.

There were no details; nothing here she could remember to describe; only from out the indescribable, a voice reached her

inmost sense, demanding what she had done with her life—that most precious gift of Heaven to the moulded clay—that most solemn charge to mortal, for the good of others. To give, to take, to join in the general push of universal progress—what had she done on her part? What had she done to aid her children? What had she done to aid her husband? What had she done to aid the struggles of others?

She saw as in a mirror; and it came to her with a rush in one comprehensive view, all the vanity of the life she had adopted, and how it rendered null the good days of Fairleigh Manor! She knew that in this consciousness lay her own condemnation and her punishment. She saw the earth slip away from beneath her. She saw it glide into distance with the moon and sun, till they were seen no more. She saw the firmament roll up like a scroll till the last star had vanished; and she was still falling. Darkness unfathomable, an eternity of solitude, a silence of boundless nothing—and still she went on falling. Outside life, outside creation, outside God. There in the midst, she felt herself an infinitesimal speck of concentrated agony of terror, and still she went on falling.

And then the dreamer awoke.

"And now," said the narrator as she finished, and turned to Lady Rich, "now can you wonder at the state I am in? Can you wonder at my horror of the ball? Would you not feel as I do? I tell you, my hair stands on end as I think of it. I shall lose my senses if you persist in talking of it. And the long and short of it is, I won't go."

"Pooh!" exclaimed Lady Rich, tossing her head with her usual levity. "I grant that your nightmare is very thrilling. All the same, my dear, I think you intensely silly. A nightmare is not a reason for keeping a lovely woman from a ball given in her honour. And, to say the truth, your absence would be such a breach of good breeding that I should be ashamed to own you ever after, or be seen with you. And now, I want to see your dress," she continued in a rattling interrogatory. "Where is it? In the dressing-room, here? Yes! oh, how lovely! I never saw anything so exquisite! Why, you will have all the men at your feet and all the women dying of envy."

Saying which, she came up to the bedside with a feather in her hand, trying it on herself.

Meanwhile Mrs. Gunning had said nothing. The fact is, Lady Rich systematically snubbed this lady whenever she met her, whether in public or in private; and especially here at Mrs. Fairleigh's, she ignored her presence as completely as if she never existed.

I own I have often spoken severely of Mrs. Gunning; and she deserved it. Still I must do her the justice to say that on this particular occasion she tried to do her duty. When Lady Rich essayed to talk Mrs. Fairleigh into going to the ball, despite the

Doctor's express prohibition, every line of her face and attitude was expressive of disapproval. And just as Lady Rich approached the bedside, she adroitly slipped behind her, and locked the dressing-room door; then put the key into her reticule. For in those days ladies used to keep their pocket-handkerchiefs and keys in reticules, or netted bags, slung on the arm.

Well, fashionable ladies sometimes forget themselves, in more ways than one, and this is all I can say in apology for the indescribable scene I am going to relate.

Two ladies well known in the court circles of the day; in the presence of a patient suffering from overstrained nerves; behold these ladies raising their voices, unwarrantably loudly, bandying words with one another; calling one another names, and ordering one another out of a house which was not theirs. And what is worse and more amazing still, they both, from opposite sides of the bed, rushed at the bell-rope, at one and the same moment, and tore it out of one another's hands so violently that it came down with a crash over Mrs. Fairleigh's head.

I don't know whether it hurt her; but she was so upset with the number of servants who hurried upstairs to see what was the matter, and so alarmed at the warlike demonstrations of the two belligerents, that she turned to her mother, as the easiest to deal with, and entreated her to go home for the present, and return in the evening, when she and her friend—my own mother—might, if possible, spend the night with her.

This was acceded to on one condition—that Mrs. Fairleigh should give her sacred promise not to stir from the house till their return.

With this assurance, Mrs. Gunning and my mother went their way, leaving the field to Lady Rich; which, to say the least of it, was bad generalship, and an egregious mistake.

The two ladies did not separate. They agreed to dine together and keep one another company till nine. But when they returned, according to agreement, and reached Mrs. Fairleigh's house, the bird had flown.

Great was their consternation. They summoned the maid to question her. Abigail reported that Lady Rich had never left the house at all. She sent home for her ball-dress and things, and made her toilette there. Mrs. Fairleigh had got up and dressed too. She had never looked so beautiful.

"But how did she get her dress?" asked Mrs. Gunning in amaze. "I had the key in my bag."

Abigail answered that she supposed that was the reason they sent for the locksmith, for the room was open at that moment.

"But it is too early to go to a ball!" remarked Mrs. Gunning.

Abigail said she thought her lady and Lady Rich were going somewhere else first; she heard them say as much.

Mrs. Gunning turned to my mother in dismay. "Suppose anything were to happen to her, as it did in her dream?"

"Dreams always go by contraries," urged my mother, quoting an Irish proverb by way of consolation. "Suppose we sit up!"

It was late in January and the weather was still cold and raw. But a good fire brought warmth into the room where they sat, and with cards, supper and gossip, they managed to while away the time while they watched.

At half-past twelve a thundering knock came to the door, startling sleepers and wakers alike. It was a hackney coach with a gentleman sitting by the driver. Two women strode out of the inside, and between the three, they managed to carry in the unconscious form of Mrs. Fairleigh.

Doctor Harnett was sent for, and he did not leave the house till morning, trying his best all the while to bring her back to consciousness. But nothing could save her. Once, and once only, she opened her eyes and called for her husband. Alas, he was far away in the country; and only reached his home to see her borne away on the bier that came to fetch her to the churchyard.

It made a tremendous sensation in the fashionable world, and for days nothing else was spoken of. It was said that at the ball Mrs. Fairleigh had been voted far more beautiful than either of her aunts; her eyes were finer than Lady Coventry's, and her complexion fresher and more delicate than the Duchess of Argyle's. Her hair, too, was the most beautiful that ever was seen.

Monodies were written on her early death, as there had been on the early death of Lady Coventry; and for some short time the tragedy caused such a sensation as to throw a damp over the gaieties of the season, and perhaps recalled many a giddy wife to her home and her duties. At least we may hope so.

And even here, my story, cropping up unexpectedly after such a long lapse of years—who knows what serious thought it may induce. For nothing is ever lost. The past is never past; it is but the bud which holds the present; as the present is the flower which holds the fruit which shall yield and scatter its seed to all eternity.

M. F. W.



STORIES FROM THE STUDIOS.

A SEA STORY.

BY THOMAS WOOLNER, R.A.

I KNOW of no greater pleasure than to chat with good-tempered, intelligent sailors who, enriched by experience in their perilous duties, show in their observations the fresh stamp of individuality. To enjoy this was my good fortune from July 24 to October 27 in the year 1852.

Tired of what then seemed to me the monotony of civilisation, and pricked by a spirit of adventure, I joined two artist friends and took passage in the good ship *Windsor*, bound for Port Phillip, in Victoria, our intention being to try our fortune in the Gold Fields there. Soon after leaving Plymouth we ran into what the sailors called "a nasty cross swell," in which the vessel pitched and shook so violently, that nearly all the passengers on board, for imperative reasons, sought their cabins, where, the scuttles being fastened close, the confined atmosphere made them worse than they were in the open air. We who remained on deck were continually washed with heavy spray that dashed over the bulwarks; but the appearance of the sea being wild and exhilarating we only took heed of our wetting as a necessary part of the entertainment.

In a few days, having arranged our cabin comfortably, we had plenty of leisure to read, watch the waves and the clouds, discuss our prospects with other passengers, and, as occasion offered, chat with the sailors, with whom I soon became on very friendly terms. On days when the vessel was moderately steady, I used often to sketch likenesses of the officers and others, and these sketches gave considerable amusement on board.

Charley Webb, who had by irregularities been reduced from the dignity of skipper to an able-bodied seamen, came to me one day with a mysterious air and mumbled out that he had a great favour to ask, and if I would be so good he should be very much obliged. The truth was, at Demerara was an old black gal who was very partial to him; and he knew nothing in the world would please her so much as a bit of a likeness of her Charley. Would I just take his figurehead off a bit for her? When he got to Sydney he should be sure to find some old shipmate who would be going to Demerara, and he could get him to take his likeness to the old gal.

Charley was a favourite of mine and I took unusual pains with his portrait, finishing it more carefully than I had done any of the others. The result was a likeness as exact as I was able to make it. One

of my friends mounted it on tinted paper with gilded lines and secured it under glass so that it looked presentable and compact. Old Charley was the idol of all the other sailors, and their verdict was unanimous in praise of his likeness, and by this I became so especially popular with them that everything I said or did was sure to be right. Indeed, they carried their admiration so far that on rainy nights when I joined them in the forecabin to smoke and yarn, they told me I ought to have been a sailor. It was a pity I wasn't. I was in fact a good sailor spoiled.

Among my sailor friends was one I name Lee. He had singularly small, white hands, and though doing his work as well as the rest, I rather wondered at there being so much power in those delicate proportions.

One Sunday Lee appeared at the capstan in his daily costume to attend morning service, and was reprimanded by the Captain for "coming dirtily dressed to prayers." In this the Captain was mistaken, for although Lee was in an ordinary working blouse, it was as clean as it could be; and to my picture-loving eyes he looked as natural and as proper as a man could look.

On the Sunday following my friend appeared in magnificent attire. White duck trousers, a handsome blue frock coat, black waistcoat, silk necktie, black kid gloves, black beaver hat, fine boots, and a handsome cane. After service Lee received a lecture from the Captain "for making a buffoon of himself;" whereat he was, or affected to be, highly indignant, having taken so much trouble to appear smart.

One day, having Lee to myself, and wanting to understand the secret of those neatly made hands and superior manners, I asked for an account of his life. He told me that he was the son of a clergyman in Devonshire; and being of an unruly disposition, when a boy he ran away to sea, where he had remained ever since; for, being ashamed of what he had done, he had never returned home.

At that time I was given to phrenology and studying the formation of heads with reference to character; and often during fine evenings upon deck I would examine the heads of sailors and of passengers to tell them their ruling tendencies and dispositions.

Once when it was Lee's turn to have his nature unfolded, I told him that he had ideality in larger proportion than any other faculty, and that, above all things, he was fond of anything charming and beautiful. He owned, in an awkward kind of way, that he was rather fond of pretty things.

"'Rather,'" said I; "your love of beauty has nothing to do with rather. You love pretty things so well you would sooner lose your dinner than miss seeing any beautiful sight."

"No, no," he retorted; "I am not so bad as that. I am fond of such things, but I would not lose my dinner for them. No, no."

He, of course, imagined this disclaimer supported his dignity for

rough manliness, and that I should be satisfied with his faint admission. But he had, in this instance, reckoned without his host ; for I began to talk of general subjects, and, after a while, gradually veered towards the beauties of Devonshire scenery : describing the huge forest trees I had seen there ; their broad shadows on the grass ; undulating glades, barred and mottled with sunshine, tempting onwards to the blue ethereal distance, unless some bright pool, half smothered in flowers, and haunted by innumerable wings, carried attention some other beauty-bewildered way.

"And think of all this scenery," said I, "after a summer shower, when every petal, grass-blade and twig is hung with waterdrops ; and, as the sun breaks forth again, every drop, smitten to a little sun, twinkles and burns, and glistens like the great original. Think of all these, and a thousand other delightful things, and then tell me if there is anything else in life to rival them, unless it be a taut ship going, with a spanking breeze, fourteen or sixteen knots an hour."

"You are right," cried Lee. "Many and many a time have I wandered in just such a place when a boy ; and many a time have I been wetted through, and walked on till I was dry again ; and often have I been scolded for coming in long after dinner-time by my mother, who used to threaten that the next time I was late I should go without any. One day—how well I remember it !—it was so bright and beautiful, I went on from one place to another, farther and farther, till at last it began to be dusk before I thought of turning to go home. And when I did reach home it was so late all there had begun to be alarmed, and were wondering if anything had happened to me. My mother was very angry, and said my conduct was beyond endurance ; and, as she had often threatened, now I really should suffer punishment, and have no dinner for my disobedience ; and I was actually sent dinnerless to bed."

"So that you really did prefer to lose your dinner than to miss seeing the beautiful sights. That is just what I told you that you would do."

The roars of laughter and merry banter that followed threw poor Lee into sad confusion. His face became red as the wattles of a turkey cock, and he walked away, shaking his head, but saying nothing.

About the middle of October we reached Port Phillip, where the multitude of masts appeared to stretch to an infinite distance. All the vessels of the world seemed there lying peacefully at anchor.

On board our ship nothing could exceed the confusion ; packing and unpacking, boxes passing to and fro from the hold, and the universal restlessness of passengers and crew. We had to wait many weary days before we could get a steamer to carry us ashore, so busy were they all in those days of the golden age.

One evening the Captain had all the sailors upon the quarter-deck,

and made them a speech promising good wages and a bonus if they would remain with the ship, and that everything should be done to make them comfortable. There was not much response to these good offers, the men being most of them bitten with the gold fever.

Some time after the Captain had finished his harangue, as the sun was setting, Lee came and said that he wanted to have a talk with me, and I went with him on to the fore-castle.

He then in a low voice, not much above a whisper, told me he meant to leave the ship, get a berth in Melbourne for a time, save money, go to the diggings, and get a lot of gold. He should then send for his wife and daughter and regularly settle in the country, and he asked me what I thought of his plan? I demanded what possible good could come of my giving him an opinion if he had already made up his mind what he was going to do?

"But I want to hear what you think," he said.

"Oh, very well. Then if you must know what I think, I consider yours a very bad plan. You engaged to sail to Australia, India and China, and to return to the Thames in the same ship, and in common honesty you are bound to perform your contract. If every man broke his engagement whenever it suited him to do so there would be an end to every enterprise in the world, and we should none of us be able to exist as civilised beings."

He moodily replied that a man was bound to do the best for himself and his family.

"Yes," I said, "that is perfectly true; a man should always do the best for himself and his family; but the question is whether behaving dishonestly is ever doing the best. I think not."

He urged that a man did not often find a chance of making his fortune, and must be a fool to miss one when within his reach. Did I not think so? I told him that I would describe two pictures, and he might select which of them he liked best as an example.

"We will suppose that you get safely away from the ship. You then easily obtain a berth in Melbourne, and receive high wages. After awhile you have saved enough to venture an expedition to the gold-fields, where by hard work, aided by sailor skill and dexterity, you succeed in obtaining a handsome amount of gold. You then send to England for your wife and daughter, enter into some business, and become very prosperous; buy land amidst beautiful scenery, build your house; and, as this is a great country for vines, you may have them trailing over your own doorway, and enjoy the rest of your life surrounded by your own flocks and herds in old-fashioned patriarchal grandeur."

Lee was in high rapture, and said that I had hit off his own thoughts to a T, and that it was exactly what he had been looking forward to. Nothing could please him more.

"Yes," I said, "the picture is pleasant enough so far; but wait until I have finished before taking it entirely to heart. In the evening of

life, resting in the shadow of your patriarchal vine, you may be gladdened with many stalwart sons and graceful daughters ; and do you think that, considering the circumstances you can never fail to remember, you will be able to look them in the face and discourse upon the dignity of truth and virtue, and the evil consequences of any deviation from either in the way a father ought to talk to his children ? Will not the thought that all your prosperity was based upon a great wrong to your employer check and paralyse all you would say to them ? And could a man feel a deeper degradation than in knowing that he dares not speak worthily to his own children ?

"This is one picture. I will now give you the other.

"You keep to your engagement and stand by the ship ; you go to India and China ; you return to England and receive your high wages with likewise the promised bonus. Your diligence has recommended you to the favour of the Captain and officers, who allow you on their next voyage to work your passage out as passenger seaman. You bring with you your wife and child as passengers, and you all arrive safely at Melbourne, where you are soon employed at a salary better than you could ever have reasonably expected. Whether you go to the gold-fields or stay in the town you are sure to be prosperous ; and whatever wealth you may then make you can always feel that it is really and truly your own ; and at the close of your days you will feel that throughout life you had always done your duty as an honest man."

My friend Lee seemed nervous and jerky, and did not regard the last picture with much complacency ; for I suppose it seemed somewhat dull and jog-trot, wholly unlike the visions that had crowded his mind for some time past ; and he again asserted that a man should do the best for himself when the chance offered.

I told him that he must please himself ; I had put the two ways before him ; the wrong way, and the right way. The first seemed pleasant enough, but unfortunately it led to evil ; whereas the other was the path of virtue and led to peace and happiness. If he preferred the evil, he knew the way to it. It was no concern of mine which way he went ; he had asked for my views, and I had given them ; but it rested with himself whether he would take advantage of what he had been told.

I then relit my pipe, which had gone out during our conversation, and left the sailor to think matters over : and should probably, but for the following incident, never have remembered the subject again.

Two days later, about five o'clock in the afternoon, the steamer which was to take us ashore lay alongside, and we were all crowding at the gangway to get on board as soon as we could. While I was awaiting my turn, I felt my coat twitched several times, and on looking round I saw Lee with an agitated countenance, who said he wanted to speak to me. I went with him to the port side of the ship, behind a huge pile of packages, boxes and trunks, where he gripped

my hand and said he should follow my advice. I asked him what advice I had given. He told me it was about not leaving the ship; he meant to stick to her; and he should never forget my words. Poor fellow! his eyes were full of tears. He hung down his head, and giving my hand another hard grip, said: "God bless you; I shall never forget you," and went hurriedly away. I never saw him after.

This occurred in October, 1852.

In January, 1854, I went to New South Wales, having spent the interval mining in the various Fields of Victoria, travelling about the wild, strange country there, and modelling small medallion likenesses in Melbourne.

After I had been some weeks in Sydney, modelling likenesses by day, and in the evenings enjoying the beauties of its matchless harbour, within whose waters the blues of the forget-me-not and the sapphire hold the field in ever-interchanging rivalry, I heard that the *Windsor* was lying in harbour.

I was not long in discovering where she lay, when I took a boat, went on board, and had the gratification of again seeing my friends: the officers and some of the sailors with whom I had spent so much pleasant time. They made numerous inquiries of our shipmates, who were also our gold-digging companions, and of our expeditions, our success and prospects, and of all that friends would know who, endeared by close association, meet after a long absence. I made abundant inquiry concerning the sailors and officers who were not then with the vessel. At length I asked one of the mates if he could tell me what had become of Lee, as I knew that he intended to continue with them during the whole voyage.

"Oh, yes; we had a letter from him about a week ago. When we left Port Phillip, in 1852, he sailed with us to India, and then went on to China, and returned with us to London. He behaved so well during the whole voyage that the Captain and officers were vastly pleased with him. He not only worked well himself but he had great influence with the other men, and helped considerably to keep them in good humour and at their duty. At the end of the cruise he had the whole of his wages to receive together with a handsome bonus; and when we sailed on this voyage he came with us working his way out as a sailor passenger, and bringing his wife and little daughter with him. We left him at Melbourne, and in his letter he says that he got work the day after landing, and that his wages being £5 a-week, he feels very comfortable and happy."

If he is living now I have no doubt he is a prosperous and a happy man. If he should ever read these words he will recognise his own likeness, and I daresay will still hold the advice I gave him in honour. But with whatever feeling of gratitude he may think of me, I feel sure that I shall ever regard him with yet higher respect: for my experience of life has taught me that it is an easier thing to give, than to take and act upon even the wisest advice.

THE EMPRESS VICTORIA OF GERMANY.

THE younger generation are not so rich in memories of the past as their elders—hence they have no personal recollections of the Empress Victoria of Germany, when she, as child and maiden, lived in our midst and made herself a place in the hearts of her mother's subjects.

No child was ever surrounded with more love and tenderness from the day of her birth than was the Princess Royal. And well for her that it was so; for with her characteristics, her special talents and her stern sense of right and wrong, neglect and harshness would have made her too determined, too hard and cold, and her great cleverness, without its robe of gentleness, would have made her life a lonely one.

No parents, whatever their rank in life, could have been more solicitous for their child's welfare than were those of the Princess Royal of England. They fostered the good in her; educated her with a thoroughness which would have seemed wonderful in a previous generation; watched over her recreation and her games; chose her teachers and her servants with every care, and presided over her studies and directed every step of her progress. Every half-hour had its set duty, and from her earliest days she was the constant companion of her father, which was an education in itself.

It was the habit of the Queen to read daily a few verses of the Bible to her little daughter, and on one occasion she came to the verse "And God made man in His own image," when either the child's artistic nature rebelled, or a vein of humour was touched, for she exclaimed, "Oh, mamma, surely not the doctor!" who, it seems, was a very ugly man.

With the cottagers on the Balmoral estate she was quite at home, and an immense favourite; she became familiar with their every-day life, and nothing delighted her more than tying on an apron and stirring the porridge-pot.

One poor Scotchwoman, who was a great favourite of the Princess's, had a baby whom the royal child took under her protection, and as the time for the christening drew near, begged that she might stand god-mother.

The day and hour being fixed, the priest, the baby and all its belongings were assembled in the Presbyterian Church, but no royal god-mother put in an appearance, so another god-mother was selected from among those present and the ceremony proceeded. It was almost concluded when the Princess came in breathless, saying, "Oh! I am so sorry! Could you not do it over again?"

When she was eight years old, the late Emperor, then Prince

of Prussia, paid a visit to our Queen. With him (her future father-in-law) the child became a great favourite ; she walked, rode and drove with him, and there can be no doubt that the first idea of a marriage between her and the young heir of Prussia crossed the minds of the parents, though no expression was given to it.

De Bunsen, on the contrary, asserts that the first suggestion of a union between the two was made in the following manner by his father :—

The Princess—now Dowager Empress—Augusta came to England in 1852 to see her aged relative the Queen Dowager, and it was while waiting for the Princess in an ante-room that he, de Bunsen's father, amused himself by looking over some beautiful engravings which had been sent for the Princess to select from.

Amongst others, he was struck with a very fine picture of Waterloo and the farm-house of "La Belle Alliance," from which the Belgians have named the battle in the foreground.

Seeing several portraits of the Princess Royal and of Prince Frederick about the room, he hastily placed one of each over the large engraving of the battle as he quitted the table to bow to her Royal Highness, Princess Augusta. The first thing, therefore, that attracted her attention were the smiling faces of the Prince and Princess under which was written in large characters "La Belle Alliance." It is said that a rapid glance was exchanged between them, but no word spoken.

Of course it was but natural that there should have been many suitors for the hand of our Princess ; and it is believed that had the King of Sardinia been a Protestant he would have had the best chance, for Prussia at this time did not stand well with England, having given offence during the Russian war ; and it is said that but for the ingredient of Protestantism, Prince Frederick would scarcely have gained his suit. But surely England would have put politics on one side when she saw the strong affection existing between the Prince and Princess. We are a sentimental nation, and rejoice in a love match.

In the several visits paid by Prince Frederick to the English Court he made himself very dear to the Queen and Prince Albert, and popular personally with the people.

It was when the Princess was fifteen that he asked permission to press his suit, but Prince Albert, though giving his full consent and that of the Queen, did not like his child to be disturbed previous to her confirmation, and begged he would delay his declaration of love to the Princess, if possible, until that should have taken place.

But the Princess, who was very observant, saw that there was a secret, and soon heard from the Prince's lips what it was. He told his tale on an old bridge while walking out with her, presenting her at the same time with a spray of white heather, that emblem of purity

and good luck : and so it happened that the heir to the Prussian throne left Balmoral on the 1st October, 1855, an engaged man, he being twenty years of age and she fifteen.

The engagement, however, was to be kept a strict secret, because of the bride's youth. It was the old, old story, as full of romance in the palace as in the cottage.

On returning to Berlin after his engagement, his father asked him what he really thought of his future bride. The answer the Prince made was a very earnest one, coming as it did from so young a man.

"In my position," he said, "and with my future destinies, my special duty is to consider the mind, character and tendencies of my future consort infinitely more than external appearance. The latter won my heart, the former my admiration and profound respect. They are such as will, I think, ensure my domestic happiness, and win for us both the love and esteem of the Prussian nation."

During the two years which intervened between the engagement and the marriage, the Prince paid several short visits to England, and was as much like any other lover as well could be. In his absence the Princess went about charming everyone by her sweet and kindly manner. As an illustration of this I give the following.

About nine o'clock one cold, foggy morning in February, a royal carriage drew up to the Mint on Tower Hill, and out stepped the Princess Royal, followed by a lady and two gentlemen. At this hour none of the principal officers had arrived, and the only person there happened to be Mr. Newton, the senior officer on duty, therefore on him devolved the duty of conducting her and her companions through the coining-rooms, and explaining the various processes through which the metal passed.

Not having much knowledge of court etiquette, Mr. Newton felt very much embarrassed in addressing the Princess, and seeing this she said in the kindest manner, "Will you please to waive all ceremony, and treat me exactly as you would any lady friend of your own who had called unexpectedly and wished to study the art of money-making."

This kind, frank speech put Mr. Newton at his ease, and he says a more agreeable task he never had than in giving the Crown Princess lessons in the method of converting precious metals into current coin of the realm. On leaving she thanked him very much and said, "I shall never spend a sovereign again without thinking of you and the trouble you take in making money for the public."

The marriage took place in the Chapel Royal, St. James's Palace, in the winter of 1858. The Princess had eight bridesmaids, who were also her intimate friends. Their costume, which was of white tulle with wreaths and bouquets of roses and white heather, was designed by the Princess herself, and gave proof of her good taste and artistic skill.

Her own dress was of white moire, trimmed with Honiton lace and bouquets of orange blossom and myrtle; her veil, also, was of Honiton, the pattern being the Rose, Shamrock and Thistle.

The newly-married pair spent the first few days in Windsor, but on the 2nd of February, eight days after the wedding, the Princess Royal took leave of father and mother and the home of her childhood, and with her husband began the journey which was to take her to another land and people, and to an entirely different home-life to that she was leaving.

Prussia, in the centre of which the newly-married pair were to establish their home, was then as now, a highly intellectual but above all a military nation, a nation with an unbounded belief in its own superiority over other nations.

Perhaps it is owing to the military character of its people that princesses and women generally have never found so much favour in Prussia as princes and men; and also that domestic life is less valued here than in England; otherwise it would be unaccountable, for some of its princesses and queens have been angels of goodness. And of its women one need only relate one anecdote to show their heroism, their self-sacrifice, and their desire to share in the burdens of their country.

During the war with the great Napoleon, when boys and old men even rushed to arms; when he who could not enter the ranks gave his money; and he who had no money, gave his labour, the Prussian women were no whit behind. Perceiving that the exchequer could not hold out, they came forward and poured in of their costly jewels to the treasury, and for these free gifts of almost inestimable value, each received a simple *iron cross*, and these same iron crosses have become the most valued heirlooms in many of the old Prussian families.

The order of the "Iron Cross" is now one of the most noble in Germany, yet the heroism which gave rise to it is almost forgotten, or, if remembered, regarded with indifference.

It is easy to see, therefore, that the life of our Princess amongst these people would be difficult, and to find favour in their sight an almost impossible thing, unless, indeed, she could forget her own nationality and her father's house, and become in tastes, sympathy, affections and politics a Prussian of the Prussians. This would have been no easy task for an older and more experienced person; but for a girl of our Princess's age and character—her intense love of England—her great talents, her love of having her own way—it was an impossibility.

There was nothing in her reception to find fault with; indeed, her entrance into Berlin was like a joyful triumph.

All the ladies attached to her service were Germans of high degree, with one exception, and this was an English lady to act as amanuensis and English reader of correspondence: an appointment due to the thoughtful kindness of her father-in-law, the late Emperor.

The principal residence of the newly-married pair was to be in Berlin, in what is called the old King's Palace ; a quaint building, half cottage and half palace ; but not being quite ready to receive them, they had, for a short time, those apartments in the Royal Schloss which had been used by the Prince and Princess of Prussia, and by their daughter and son-in-law, the Grand Duke and Duchess of Baden during their honeymoons.

The Princess had scarcely settled down among her husband's people, when they discovered that, like their former Queen Louise, she would not be trammelled and kept in chains by the strict and tedious court etiquette, which obtained in Prussia to a greater extent than in any other country. She would neither subject herself to the Master of Ceremonies nor to the *Oberhofmeisterin*, but made it clear that, like her mother in England, she intended to hold the reins of her household in her own hands. She, with her brothers and sisters, had been taught to keep their own boxes and drawers tidy and orderly. This she continued to do after her marriage, and when the *Oberhofmeisterin* begged her not to do this, as it was derogatory to the dignity of her new position, she answered by locking all her drawers and putting the keys in her pocket.

Our Princess was great-minded, and the petty rules of etiquette fretted her, and, strange though it may seem, this built up a barrier between her and the majority of the people.

But she possessed to the full the love and passionate admiration of her husband, who has been heard frequently to say, "We will ask my wife ; she knows how to do everything." Even this has been a cause of dissatisfaction among some, and these not a few, who declare that his love for his wife has made him almost English.

And thus the early months of her married life went by, made very happy by the love of her husband, and the affection which sprang up between herself and the Princess Charles (sister of the Empress) and her accomplished daughter-in-law, Princess Frederick Charles (the mother of our Duchess of Connaught). This last lady and our Princess were constantly together, having the same tastes and sympathies, and delighting equally in the society of clever people who frequented Princess Charles's salon, among whom Humboldt was a constant visitor. Each of these ladies had a studio in her home, where she worked assiduously, and thus it happened that the letter which went home daily to the mother, and weekly to the father, told of a bright, happy and busy life.

Prince Albert, the good and loving father, never lost an opportunity of strengthening his child in her daily duties, and preparing her to bear with calmness anything unpleasant which should cross her path. In one of his letters he remarks :

"The public, just because it has been rapturous, may now grow minutely critical. This need cause you no uneasiness."

He begs her also to overlook her household, like a good house-



PEGLI, NEAR GENOA.—Drawn by the Empress Victoria.

wife, with punctuality, method and vigilant care, and not to forget that in the affairs of life the apportionment of time is essential. And no one can doubt, who has had the privilege of belonging to her household, that the Princess carried out his wishes for her to the utmost. She managed her household herself, as any lady of ordinary rank would do, with simplicity and economy.

It came to her knowledge, soon after her marriage, that one of her housemaids went about her work, brush and dustpan in hand, with a flounced dress, and hair dressed in the height of fashion; so she sent for the maid one morning into her own particular room, and made her a present of a brown woollen dress and a white cap, both carefully and prettily made, and told her that for the future she must wear these about her work.

This particular room of hers looked very English. She had decorated it with the busts of her parents, and the many ornaments she had brought from home, exactly as any other newly-married woman would have done of whatever rank.

As the time drew near for the birth of her first child, she made all the preparations herself—made also her own choice of those who were to nurse and tend the baby, and performed a very popular act when she chose a German "*Wrege Frau*."

Great was the joy when on the 27th January, 1859, Field-Marshal von Wrangel came out on the balcony of the palace and proclaimed to the crowds waiting below for news, "All is well, my children; it is as sturdy a little recruit as heart could wish to see."

The first great sorrow of her life was the loss of her father. Who can wonder at the effect upon her, seeing what he had been to her from her earliest years?

He had written one of his characteristic letters to her on her birthday a few weeks before his death, full of love and tender solicitude for her. In it he bade her "spare herself, and nurse herself, and get completely well," for she had caught cold at her father-in-law's coronation.

She and her husband had been Crown Prince and Princess since January 2, 1861, but the coronation did not take place until October of the same year.

"May your life," writes Prince Albert, "which has begun beautifully, expand still further for the good of others and the contentment of your own mind."

As we watch her daily life, with its difficulties, its opportunities, its joys, its sorrows, for, alas, these last have neither been light nor few, it is impossible to think of her other than a woman of extraordinary talent, extensive education and richness of mind, and it seems as though the very abundance of her intellectual gifts prevents them at times from working harmoniously together.

How can she with all these powers avoid having very decided opinions of her own upon politics as well as upon other sciences?

And that these opinions should occasionally be in opposition to those of her surroundings is of course to be expected. Fortunately she does not look upon politics as her own special province: and so, when she finds her opinions to be in direct opposition to the powers that be, she takes a short holiday into the country, which enables her to hold her own views and prevents the necessity of acquiescing in those of others.

She is not a *woman of the world*, properly so called; she does not care for society, but she uses her power and position in such a way that the poor, the sick, and the world of art adore her, whatever others may do.

In her salon one meets men of letters, of science and art, who are never otherwise to be seen in society. She is ever striving to improve the condition of her own sex and to devise new means and channels of female occupation. In her love of art and encouragement of literature she has always been nobly aided by her husband.

A German speaking of her says, "It is only due to the Crown Princess to say that her influence and example have largely contributed to the making of the German nation." This is high praise indeed from a German.

She herself is a most excellent artist, for, notwithstanding the many pressing duties inseparable from her high position, the Crown Princess has gone on steadily with her drawing and painting, not taking direct instruction, but influenced and built up, as it were, by the greatest artists of the day.

The Art Gallery, which has developed into an imposing building, owes its existence and prosperity to her efforts and influence. As long ago as 1860 the Berlin Academy elected her as member, acknowledging in this deed the value of her sympathy and work to the artist world.

A celebrated artist (A. V. Werner) had the honour of being presented to the Crown Prince and Princess just after his return from the war of 1871, in order that he might show them his sketches of Versailles, and he describes the interview as follows:

"While the Crown Princess looked over my drawings, she held her youngest daughter in her arms, who, in the meantime, played with the iron cross hanging from her father's neck.

"I was astonished at the excellent and clever remarks with which the royal lady accompanied the turning over of the leaves of my portfolio." He goes on to say: "I had formerly seen drawings of hers, and with others had expressed my doubts as to her having really done them, but from this time I had many opportunities of seeing her actually at work, and there could be no longer a doubt."

The Crown Prince and Princess often spent a short holiday in Italy, and in 1875 Werner happened to be in Venice at the same time that they were there. He says she might be seen constantly

either in the Piazza di San Marco or on the Grand Canal, quite alone with her sketch-book.

Sometimes she went to Passini's Atelier, mixing there with other students.

One day it seems the students, with the Crown Princess among them, were painting in water-colours in the Court of San Gregorio, when towards the end the Crown Princess posed herself in a black dress trimmed with white lace, and a Rubens' hat with white feather, leaning against a basket full of onions and fennel, which they borrowed of a lad who was passing. This picture may be seen in many a student's room as a valued remembrance of the days in Venice.

This same artist says he has had many opportunities of looking through the Crown Princess's sketch-book, and that he never ceased to admire the artistic eye which had caught all that was worth most in the view, and expressed it in the most correct manner.

But if we want to see her in her brightest and best character we must see her at home, and this will not be difficult, for she has refused to be walled in with etiquette, and it is quite easy to reach her ; as many a sick person, many a poor artist would testify.

Never was there a better wife and mother. From the very first she has devoted herself to her home and children, and tried to establish a loving, healthy atmosphere in the family life, and to this endeavour she has stood true, though it has brought her many bitter hours in the opposition of the Court and its etiquette. Perhaps with all her determination she would have failed but for the unswerving love and support of the Crown Prince, her husband.

The more children there were in the nursery the happier she seemed, and the more earnest became the task of watching and educating, and though great strictness was exercised there was no lack of love. The children's little dresses were cut out under her own eye, the food prepared according to her order, and their education and their games were equally under her direction.

The Crown Prince accompanied her at least once every day to the nurseries, and often in the early mornings both father and mother would be present while the governess gave her lessons.

These lessons began as early as six o'clock in the summer and seven in winter, and continued until the family breakfast hour, half-past nine. The Crown Princess thought these hours the best in the day for lessons, as they were quiet and free from interruption.

After breakfast a short time was permitted for recreation, and lessons began again, lasting until one. In Berlin the family dinner-hour was five, but in their country house it was two.

Perhaps the happiest part of her married life has been spent on her estate and farm-house of Bornstädt, which was presented to her shortly after her arrival in Berlin by her father-in-law.

Here the whole family have lived the simplest of lives : the mother

attending to her garden and dairy, the father to his prize animals, the children to their gardens, their miniature earthworks and fortifications, and their cricket-field ; and all meeting together at their two o'clock dinner.

It has been said that no children have enjoyed the privilege of making others happy more frequently than those of the Crown Prince and Princess. They have had the school children out from Berlin in the summer months, and each member of the Royal Family vied with the other in making the day a pleasant one for them.

They knew all the people round about the estate, and have been the centre of happiness to them all.

The mother has known many sorrows in her married life. She lost a dear little son of eleven years old, and the grief of both parents was great indeed. The Crown Princess's health broke down under it, and she was recommended to try a warmer climate for the winter ; so she and the children went to Pegli on the Riviera, which she has so learnt to love and which has given her such abundance of subjects for her pen and pencil.

She has had to endure her husband's absence on the battle-field just like any other wife ; and it was during this time she joined her mother-in-law, the present Empress Augusta, in providing nurses and help for the wounded soldiers.

It seems, too, that her husband has never been strong—indeed, he has often been very ill, causing her the deepest anxiety—and now, in this deep affliction, which has come upon her side by side with the great position of Empress, whose heart does not throb with sympathy ?

How pathetically she herself spoke of her conflicting duties, only the other day !

"I feel," she said, "that my most sacred duty is to care, as a wife, for my husband in his illness ; and I am thoroughly conscious of the duties that I have to undertake as Queen of Prussia and German Empress, and I shall perform them to the best of my power."

Her work, hitherto and to come, is summed up by her in a few words.

"I have always," she says, "kept in view the moral and intellectual education of women, the advance of hygienic domestic arrangements, and I have endeavoured to increase the prosperity of women by opening to them fields for gaining their livelihood : and I hope to attain still more in this direction with the loyal co-operation of the women of Berlin and of the whole country."

She will have a hard task before her, for the people of Germany are sore upon the point of the English doctor having been called in to minister to their beloved emperor, and have in their soreness laid it upon her shoulders.

This mistake will be cleared up when the truth is known that she had little or nothing to do with it. Her sorrow is great enough ; let

no man or woman in her empire add a straw's weight to it. Even as I write, she is being cheered by the receipt of baskets of lilies and violets from ladies who express the wish that she may be rewarded for her great devotion and solicitude by the speedy recovery of her husband.

Her only fault, if fault it be, since her marriage, is that she could not forget the old land and the people among whom she was born and brought up. It was told me as a serious grievance that she had even used the present of money given her on her silver wedding by the Germans to build an English church in Berlin! But the Germans are a great people and generous, and will cease to think of small matters when their Empress needs their love, support, sympathy and approbation.

E. B.



THE MOORLAND BY THE SEA.

Oh, the moorland by the sea, where the purple heather groweth,
And the bracken rears its crozier midst the mosses and the ling—
Where the brown bee croons its song as it gaily homeward goeth,
And the wheeling sea bird stoopeth the white wonder of its wing.

Oh, the incense-breathing firs! the great firs that skirt the moorland,
Shedding perfume all about it, from soft surging plumes of green,
That with strong protecting arms, leaning inward from the foreland,
Let the tender, warm sea-azure, here and there slip in between.

There the little islets lie bright and fair beyond all telling,
In a ring of fairy foam bells that for ever round them play,
And the sea gulls' plaintive cry echoes o'er their rocky dwelling,
And the warm wind lightly ruffles the calm surface of the bay.

Oh, the moorland by the sea! The red sun in gallant splendour
Drops his morning kiss upon it, ere he goeth on his way,
Or athwart its gold and purple steals a benediction tender,
Ere night's starry curtains shroud him at the dewy close of day.

When he dies the fleecy clouds that come floating up from leeward,
With the gorgeous hues of crimson that become his royal state,
And they pass above our heads and go slowly sailing seaward,
Like a flock of angels' pinions up to heaven's golden gate!

Oh, my fancy roameth yet to those lovely far off places,
And the honey-scent of heather yet brings back again to me
Many a mem'ry sweet and dear of kind hearts and friendly faces,
That I met in days departed on the moorland by the sea!

HELEN MARION BURNSIDE.

"WITH LOVE."

IT was on the Monday of the Christmas week—Christmas day that year falling on a Friday—that young Graham went down to the station to see his friend Geoffrey Lambert off to London. Lambert had been having a few days' shooting, only rabbit shooting, for that was all that Graham could give him, but it is not such bad sport, after all, especially if you are comfortably housed at night in a bachelor's snug quarters.

But the little holiday was over, and he was due in London in good time that morning.

"Wish you could have stayed over Christmas, old boy," said Graham, as they strolled up and down the platform.

"Wish I could," echoed Lambert; "but the mater expects me to spend it in the bosom of my family, and uncommonly dull it is there!"

"I daresay," Graham admitted absently. And then suddenly and hurriedly he jerked out:

"I say, you are a regular man about town, and have lots of sisters and all that sort of thing; I wish you would go to the shop where they get their very best gloves, and buy me half-a-dozen pairs—sixes—and have them put into a stylish box or case or something of the sort, and post them down to me at once. I—I—want them. Sorry to bother you, but you will do this for me; and then send along the bill and I will pay up."

"Only too glad to help you carry out such a praiseworthy idea, and I hope the gloves will have the desired effect. I promise you I will see about them directly. Hullo!" and Lambert here suddenly pulled Graham behind a pillar. "Who would have thought of seeing that chap here!"

"What chap?" asked Graham.

"That short fellow at the other end of the platform. He's a cousin of mine, but I don't want him to see me."

"Oh!" said Graham slowly, having at last discerned the object of Lambert's attention. "I can understand that, and I am sorry to hear he is any relation of yours. I never thought of that, though your names are the same. Yes, he's rather a black sheep. Nobody down here will have anything to say to him."

At that moment the train steamed up, and Lambert jumped in, after wishing his friend "good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Graham through the window. And then like a shy girl, added: "And you won't forget what I asked you to do for me?"

"Not I. Good-bye, again, old man!"

And the two friends parted.

That same afternoon Geoffrey Lambert found time to stroll up Regent Street. There was no need for him to ask his sister's advice as to the best shop for his commission, for he was pretty well up in such things himself, and a sophisticated man of the world compared with honest Graham. He chose the gloves with taste and care; half-a-dozen pairs of pale-coloured, many-buttoned "Suedes," such as would greatly delight any girl's heart; and then he picked out a quaintly-shaped glove case of rose satin, quilted, and in it the shopman laid the gloves neatly.

"Stop a minute," Lambert said, before the case was fastened: "and lend me a pen, will you?"

The pen was handed to him, and taking a card from his card case he scratched out the "Mr." which stood before "Geoffrey Lambert," and wrote above "With love from." This he slipped into the glove case and then instructed the shopman to put it in a cardboard box and send it to young Graham. He paid the bill himself, but instead of enclosing it in the parcel he tore it up, intending that Graham should accept the gloves as a Christmas present.

Two days afterwards Graham wrote one of his usual laconic notes.

"DEAR GEOFF,—Gloves come and gone. Thanks. How much?—Yours, F. G."

For a moment, Lambert, remembering his card, was puzzled by the "how much?" But reflecting that it was probably only Graham's polite way of hesitating to accept the gloves as a present, he paid no attention to the query, and as far as he was concerned supposed the matter at an end.

Meanwhile, poor Graham was enduring a most mortifying disappointment, for a week passed away and he received no acknowledgment of his present from the fair Miss Vincent. The following Sunday he called on her; but as she treated him with nothing more than her usual courtesy and never once referred, by word or by look, to the gloves, he was too shy to make mention of them either. If ever a man felt downcast and dismal, it was Fred Graham as he trudged back through the snow to his lonely diggings.

The day after this, Geoffrey Lambert found two letters lying on his breakfast plate when he came down in the morning. The first he opened was from Graham, short, of course, but somewhat startling.

"DEAR GEOFF,—I am leaving England for Australia. Come to the docks and see me off in the *Austral*, on Jan. 12th.

"Yours, F. G."

So this, then, was the sequel to the little episode of the gloves! "Poor old Fred!" thought Lambert regretfully. "I suppose the silly young woman has said 'no' to him, and he takes it very hard indeed. I was afraid he would. There's not a man I know who

would make a better husband than old Fred. Well, well, women are queer creatures, and heaven preserve me from having anything to do with them ! "

But he was so absorbed with thinking of his friend's trouble, that he had nearly finished breakfast before he glanced at his second letter, and then he was more surprised than pleased to recognise the handwriting of his cousin, George Lambert.

"Here's a nuisance !" he said, opening the envelope. But his countenance changed from one of annoyance to considerable surprise when the identical card which he had enclosed in the gloves to Fred Graham dropped out on to his breakfast-plate.

"What the deuce does this mean ? " he exclaimed (all these remarks were addressed to himself, for he was breakfasting alone), as he gazed long and steadfastly at the card. He turned it over, he examined it. There was no mistake and no hoax about it, for he would swear to his own peculiar handwriting at any time. But how on earth came the card into his cousin's possession ?

By-and-by he condescended to read George's letter, to see if that would enlighten him.

"DEAR GEOFFREY,—The next time you send such messages to a girl, I hope she will not mistake me for you. Here's a nice hole you have got me into, and I hope you will get me out of it as quickly as you can, for the Fair Insulted is pretty mad, I can tell you !

"Your affectionate cousin,

"GEORGE LAMBERT."

The horrible truth flashed suddenly upon Geoffrey. Graham, like the careless chap he was, had never troubled to open the glove-case, and when the girl (whoever she might be) did so, she had been confronted by his fatal card : "With love from Geoffrey Lambert. And the worst was yet to be contemplated. If "Lambert" had been an unknown name to her it would not have been so bad ; or even if she had connected it with himself—its rightful owner—but that she should assign the authorship of the card to his odious cousin, this was *the* unbearable point in the whole concern. No wonder the girl was "mad" at receiving such an insult. And then poor Graham and all his suffering ! But he should not go to Australia now !

Lambert's first step was to telegraph to his cousin :

"Wire me name and address of the lady. Do nothing else in the matter. I will make it all right. Reply paid."

The answer came back at once :

"Miss Mary Vincent, The Hollies, Bedford."

Early that same afternoon Lambert went down to Bedford. He did not seek the hospitality of Graham's rooms, but put up at the Mitre Hotel and thence sallied forth in search of the Hollies.

At the door, which was opened by a highly respectable looking butler, he asked for Miss Mary Vincent, and on being told that she

was at home, gave the butler his name ; he thought it better not to send in his unlucky card ; and was shown into a large drawing-room.

There was no one in it, and after waiting a few moments anxiously for the entrance of the lady, he felt disappointed when, the door being opened, the old butler appeared again.

"Miss Mary is sorry, sir, but she says she cannot possibly see you, and that you will understand."

"I am sorry, too," said Lambert, colouring ; "very sorry, to have to press my presence upon an unwilling lady ; but in this case I must ask you to beg Miss Vincent to see me for a moment ; I will not detain her longer." And again he waited alone.

This time, after a longer interval, the door was opened very slowly, and a small, pretty-looking girl came into the room. She was very young and seemed nervous, as no doubt she was ; for she did not raise her eyes to look at Lambert until he began :

"I have called to apologise for and to explain away a mistake which has ——"

Then she saw him, and, starting violently, she said :

"I beg your pardon, but you are not Mr. Lambert."

"Excuse me, I am Mr. Geoffrey and not Mr. George Lambert, though the latter is unfortunately my cousin."

"Won't you sit down ?" Mary Vincent said quietly, for she knew now that there was some mistake, and that she was not lowering herself by speaking to a man who had voluntarily insulted her. But Geoffrey remained standing, hat in hand, whilst he explained the whole story to her ; and though, as he went on, he was more struck by its comic than its tragic element, he told it very gravely and not at all flippantly. Miss Vincent seemed to be almost unstrung by the relief it afforded her to listen to it.

"I am very much obliged to you," she said, in a sweet, grateful, friendly way. "You have changed a most unpleasant affair into a ——" She drew up suddenly, as if afraid of having said too much, and blushed deeply.

"Into a pleasant one, I hope," Lambert said ; and then he took his leave of the still embarrassed girl, and found his way to Graham's rooms. There, he not only explained the incident to his friend, but imparted the conclusion he had arrived at from Miss Vincent's behaviour at the end of the interview ; and, encouraged by his advice, Graham lost no time in calling at the Hollies.

He abandoned the idea of going to Australia, and before the next Christmas came round Lambert had acted best man, "on the occasion of the marriage of Mr. Frederick Graham to Miss Mary Vincent."

G. H. FELL.

THE INNKEEPER'S DAUGHTER.

BY MARY E. PENN.

I.

SIX o'clock on a sultry August evening. The bell of the Hôtel du Lion d'Or, at the Picardy town of Mont-St.-Evrard, has just announced to all whom it may concern that dinner is ready, and the habitués of the table-d'hôte are dropping in leisurely, one by one, to take their accustomed places.

The dining-room windows look out on the broad sunny Market Place, with its ancient Hôtel-de-Ville and gabled houses. At the opposite end of the room a half-glass door opens into the courtyard, on the left-hand side of which is the spacious, raftered kitchen.

The Lion d'Or, though the principal inn of the town, made no pretensions to style. The innkeeper, Jacques Destrée, was wealthy enough to have owned a much more imposing dwelling. But he loved the old house where his people had lived and prospered for generations, and refused to modernise it, even to oblige his pretty daughter, who had returned from her Parisian boarding-school with ambitious views, and a strong distaste for her homely surroundings.

Valérie Destrée was the acknowledged beauty of St. Evrard; but she was far too conscious of her own attractions, the townspeople said, and "gave herself airs" unbecoming to her position; the innkeeper had done a foolish thing, they thought, in making a fine lady of the girl. In this opinion Valérie's mother thoroughly coincided. In the matter of their daughter's education, her easy-going husband had for once ventured to act in opposition to her wishes, and she prophesied that he would live to repent it.

Except on Sundays, when they appeared at the table-d'hôte, Monsieur Destrée and his family dined apart, in Madame's private sanctum—a queer little triangular room, conveniently situated between the dining-room and the kitchen, so that the mistress could keep a vigilant eye on both departments.

"Has your master come in, Rose?" she asked, when, after seeing her guests fairly launched on the first course, she entered this apartment, where a smart servant-girl was laying the cloth.

"Not yet, madame,"

Her mistress shrugged her shoulders impatiently. "He has gone to Bainville market, and has no doubt lost his train, as usual! Well, I shall not wait for him. Tell Mademoiselle Valérie—Oh, here she is," broke off Madame, as her daughter entered: a tall, graceful girl of eighteen, with brilliant dark eyes, a clear, pale complexion, and a pretty, "mutinous" mouth.

"May one ask what you have been doing all the afternoon?"

demanded her mother, with a glance of strong disapproval at the coquettish costume and elaborate coiffure. "Curling your hair?"

"No, I have been reading," the girl answered, taking a leisurely survey of herself in the glass over the chimney-piece before she subsided into her place at table.

"A novel, of course?"

"Yes, and a very good one. Madame Lebrun lent it to me."

"That's a recommendation, truly!" remarked her mother, in a tone which expressed disparagement of both the book and its lender.

"I can't think, mother, why you have taken such a dislike to Madame Lebrun," Valérie said, resentfully. "I am sure no one could be a kinder friend to me than she is."

"Kind! Yes, if it is kindness to flatter you, make you vainer than you are by nature, and give you ideas above your station! Jean Lemartel is quite right: she is about the most dangerous friend you could have."

Valérie coloured and bit her lip. "I wish Jean would be good enough to mind his own business. What right has he to interfere with me?"

"A very good right, Valérie, as your future husband."

"He is not my husband yet, and perhaps never will be; at any rate, I am not bound to obey him before marriage. If he does not approve of me, he can seek a wife elsewhere—and so I shall tell him."

"But you would not be best pleased if he took you at your word," Madame remarked, shrewdly. "Ah, you may toss your head, Valérie, but I know what I'm saying. Jean has been devoted to you for so long that you take his affection as a thing of course; but if he transferred it to someone else,——"

"He is quite welcome to do so," struck in the girl, which called forth a retort from her mother, as she began to ladle out the soup with energy.

"A nice wife you'll make for a farmer! You are of no more use in a house than ——"

"Come, come, wife, that's enough," interrupted a voice at the door. "If the child is not useful, no one can deny that she's ornamental, and there's room in the world for roses as well as cabbages—*hein?*"

It was the innkeeper who spoke—a big, burly man of middle age, with a large, clean-shaven, good-tempered face, and kindly blue eyes which had a humorous twinkle. Valérie rose, and taking him by the lappels of his holland coat, rewarded him for his championship by a kiss on each cheek.

"Now, Jean, my lad, it's your turn," said M. Destrée, as he drew back and showed the figure of his companion: a handsome, sunburnt man of thirty, with honest brown eyes, and a mouth indicating both sweet temper and a firm will.

Valérie turned away, affecting not to hear. Jean Lemartel, nothing daunted, detained her, and kissed her cheek.

"When I am not served, I help myself," he explained.

"Quite right," approved his host, laughing, as he sat down to table, and rubbed his bald forehead with a large blue cotton handkerchief.

"And now, mother, give us our dinner. The walk from Bainville has sharpened my appetite."

"Dinner has been waiting this half-hour," returned his wife, tartly. "If everything is spoilt, it is your own fault."

"It is partly mine, madame," Jean Lemartel interposed pleasantly, as he drew a chair to Valérie's side. "I detained M. Destrée as he was passing my place, to ask his opinion upon the alterations I am making in the house. You must come too, Valérie, and tell me if you approve of them. You know for whose sake I am trying to beautify my home," he added, in a tender undertone, glancing at the pretty, clouded face at his side.

"Did you leave the books with Madame Lebrun, father?" Valérie inquired, as if her lover had not spoken.

"Ay, and found the 'Chalet' turned upside down in preparation for some grand visitors she is expecting—an English lord and his wife."

"'Visitors'? *Allez!*" Madame Destrée exclaimed, with a short laugh; "lodgers you mean. Veuve Lebrun lets her first floor during the bathing-season, though she chooses to make a mystery over it. You know that, husband."

"Well, visitors or lodgers, they are coming to-morrow; and the widow is in high feather, I can tell you. I couldn't get a word in edgeways while she was rattling on about milord and milady Del—what's-their-name?"

"Delamere," put in Valérie. "They are old friends of hers. At least, not friends exactly; but Madame Lebrun, before she married, was French governess to Lady Delamere's daughters. Madame is going to present me to her."

The hostess tossed her head. "Much good that will do you, child! Those fine folks are best at a distance."

"She wants Valérie to go to her to-morrow afternoon, and see these folks; they will have come then," remarked M. Destrée, with little tact.

"Then she may want," said his wife. "I can't spare Valérie. She is quite set up enough already without the help of Widow Lebrun's fine friends."

The girl's eyes flashed rebelliously. She turned upon Jean with an abruptness that startled him.

"I have to thank you for this, I believe. It is you who have set the mother against my friend; you would deprive me of the only amusement I have." And, throwing down her serviette, she rose from the table and left the room.

When the young farmer had recovered from his astonishment at this unexpected attack, he was about to follow her, but the host pushed him back into his chair.

"Stay where you are, lad, and eat your dinner. She will come round all the sooner, left to herself. Valérie's breezes soon blow over. As to her going sometimes to the Widow Lebrun's, I see no particular objection to it, though the fine English people may be there. One can't oppose the child's every little wish. Let's hear no more on the subject."

"Very good," said Madame, with ominous calmness. "I wash my hands of it."

While this discussion was in progress, Valérie had retreated to the garden, feeling in her angry mood as if the air indoors stifled her.

It was a large, but by no means an orderly garden that was attached to the hotel, flowers, fruit, and vegetables flourishing together in republican equality; but it had a certain picturesqueness of its own, with its tangled rose bushes, and drooping fruit-trees; its quaint hooded well, overshadowed by a weird old elder tree, and its sunny south wall, covered by a wonderful vine which was noted for producing the best grapes in the department. At the end, near the tall privet hedge which divided it from the road, was a jasmine arbour, which Valérie called her "refuge." In it she spent many a summer hour, in idleness as delightful to herself as it was exasperating to her mother.

Here Jean found her, half-an-hour later, sitting on the low rustic bench, idly picking a rose to pieces, petal by petal. She took no notice of him.

"Are you angry with me, Valérie?" he asked, as he sat down beside her, and took one of the restless little hands in his own muscular brown ones.

"I think you are very unkind, and—and interfering," she murmured, vexed to find her resentment melting away under his tender, earnest gaze. "You know how few friends I have—there is no one in this stupid place I care to associate with; and you are doing your best to divide me from the only one I value. I believe jealousy is at the bottom of it!"

"Jealousy?" he repeated, in amused inquiry. "That I am jealous of Widow Lebrun?"

"You are jealous of her influence over me, because you think it is used against yourself. That is the reason you have called her dangerous."

He pulled his beard meditatively. "That is not the only reason, Valérie, but I own that it influences me. You can't expect me to feel very kindly disposed towards a woman who is doing her best to deprive me of the dearest treasure I possess in life."

"What is that, pray?"

"Your love, sweetheart," he replied, with a warm pressure of her hand.

In spite of herself her face softened, but she only answered drily :

"You are quite sure you do possess it, then ?"

"Sure ? No. But until lately I hoped I did. Ay, and I hope so still, in spite of Madame Lebrun and her manoeuvres. Who is she, an acquaintance of yesterday, to come between you and me ? We, who have known each other all our lives ? I can hardly look back to the time when I did not love you, Valérie. My affection has become a part of my life—a part of myself, and the worthiest part of me. And you ? Oh, my dearest, let me hear you say that I have not deceived myself ; that you do love me !"

He put his arm about her as he spoke, and drew her closer to his side, laying his bronzed cheek against hers.

"I thought you had taken that for granted, as we are supposed to be engaged," she returned, trying to speak lightly, though her voice trembled and her breath came quickly, with an emotion which was new to her. She could hardly realise that this was Jean, this ardent, pleading lover, whose tender earnestness thrilled her, in spite of herself. "My parents have given me to you——"

"I will not take you from them ; I will not take you until I know that you are content to be mine," he vehemently interrupted. "Speak to me, sweetheart ; let me have the assurance from your own dear lips !"

Valérie made a feeble attempt to disengage herself, and not succeeding, turned her head so that her face was hidden on his shoulder.

"I—yes, I am content," she whispered.

"And as soon as the nest is ready, you will come to me, my dove ?" he softly said.

"Oh, I am in no hurry to be caged ; you must leave me my liberty a little longer, Jean," she answered, drawing herself away with a little laugh.

The match for Valérie was good and suitable. Jean Lemartel was a man of substance, apart from the land he farmed, a portion of which he owned. The house belonging to it, called *Les Ormes*, was large and handsome, while Jean himself was of unblemished character and most genial disposition. St. Evrard thought Valérie was lucky to have been chosen by him.

II.

MADAME VEUVE LEBRUN, the widow of a well-to-do tradesman of Lille, had been left with a comfortable independency. A plump, over-dressed, prettyish woman of seven and thirty ; vain, self-indulgent, and not too scrupulous, but good-natured in her way, when it involved no trouble, and honestly fond of the innkeeper's daughter.

On the following afternoon, when Valérie arrived at the "Châlet Beauregard"—a pert little red-brick villa on the sandy new Boulevard near the sea—she found the fair châtelaine—who affected English habits, and was ridiculously pretentious—arranging a tea equipage on a gipsy table in her "boudoir."

"*A la bonne heure!*" exclaimed Madame, embracing her guest with effusion; "charmed to see you, my dear. I was afraid the 'powers that be' might not allow you to come."

"Has the Countess arrived?" Valérie asked, saying nothing of the little discordance there had been at home.

"The Countess cannot come," lamented Madame Lebrun, sinking into a chair with a tragic gesture of her plump white hands. "Picture to yourself my dismay, after all the preparations I had made!"

"But why can she not come?"

"The Earl is laid up with a sudden attack of gout, and may not be able to travel for some weeks. I received a telegram yesterday evening."

"How provoking!" the girl exclaimed, in a disappointed tone. "I did so wish to meet Lady Delamere."

The widow smiled and nodded mysteriously.

"Never mind, *ma belle*, you will meet someone as interesting. Who do you think arrived this morning and took me by surprise, for I had not expected him at all—Viscount Harcourt."

"Lord Delamere's son?"

"His eldest son. He is heir to the earldom and thirty thousand a-year. *Pounds!* not francs, my dear."

Valérie laughed. "How will he be able to spend it all?"

"And the most charming young man," ran on Madame, flirting her fan. "But so altered, so improved that I did not recognise him. It is true I saw but little of him when I was living with the family, but I remember him a plain, quiet, studious youth, amiable, but shy and *gauche*. He has developed into a handsome, accomplished man of the world, and—— Here he comes, I do believe!" she broke off, as a footstep sounded outside. "I asked him to take tea with me, on purpose to introduce him to you, Valérie."

Madame Lebrun rose from the sofa to receive Lord Harcourt. He was a tall, slightly-built man of six or seven and twenty, with a handsome, *blasé* face, bold blue eyes, and lips which were habitually curved in a half-cynical smile under his blonde moustache.

He sauntered into the room with his hands in his pockets, and an air of almost insolent nonchalance, which was exchanged for one of sudden interest when he saw Valérie.

"Permit me," said the widow, with her grandest air, "to present Lord Harcourt to my particular friend, Mademoiselle Destrée."

The Viscount bowed, murmuring that he was "charmed," and putting up his eye-glass, favoured the girl with a glance of undisguised admiration, which brought the colour to her cheeks.

"I was just saying," observed Madame, with an affected laugh, as she placed a chair for him, "that I find you altered past recognition, milord."

"Indeed, I hope I am!" he answered in fluent French. "Boys are generally ugly young animals, and I'm sure I was no exception to the rule. Why, how long is it, madame, since you left us?"

"Nearly ten years; though I can hardly believe it."

"Nor I, madame, when I look at you," was his polite reply, with a low bow, for he seemed to have quite the French manner. I remember you perfectly, though I was only a troublesome school-boy."

"Pardon—you were nearly seventeen, soon about to leave Eton; and you were remarkable for your steadiness and amiability."

"Is it possible?" he exclaimed laughing. "I fear I have long outgrown both those characteristics. At least, so my sisters tell me."

"A propos—how are my dear old pupils, the Ladies Maud and Hilda? You have told me nothing about them yet."

"There is not much to tell," he answered, indifferently. "You know, of course, that Maud is married?"

"Maud?" she repeated with a doubtful look. "I understood that it was Lady Hilda who married."

"Hilda, of course," he corrected hastily. "I meant Hilda. But our family histories cannot be very interesting to Mademoiselle Destrée. Suppose we change the subject?" he continued, as he rose to hand the latter her tea-cup. After which he planted himself upon an ottoman in front of her.

"Do you reside in Bainville, mademoiselle, or are you a visitor like myself?"

She glanced at him shyly under her long eyelashes.

"I live at Mont-St.-Evrard, a small town not far from here," she replied.

"Indeed? I should have taken you for a Parisienne," he remarked, looking her over with a cool and critical scrutiny which in a man of less exalted standing, Valérie would have deemed the height of impertinence. "There is nothing of the country about you—except its freshness. 'Mont-St.-Evrard' sounds picturesque. Is it a pretty place?"

"It is quaint and old-fashioned, but not otherwise interesting. There is nothing in it to attract a stranger."

"No! Yet I have a presentiment, do you know, that I shall find much to attract me," he rejoined, with an ambiguous smile, as he pulled his moustache, displaying the magnificent brilliant which sparkled on his little finger.

"If you are fond of sketching, you may," she answered, sipping her tea demurely. "The ruined Abbey of St. Evrard has often been painted."

"I shall certainly make a pilgrimage to that shrine. May I ask—a—if your house is anywhere near the Abbey?"

"No, it is in the town. We——" she coloured and hesitated. "My father keeps the Hôtel du Lion d'Or."

"But Monsieur Destrée is a landed proprietor also, and one of the wealthiest men in the district," her friend hastened to put in, detecting Lord Harcourt's involuntary look of surprise. "It is from choice not necessity that he continues the business."

"Just so; I understand," assented his lordship, and was silent a moment, looking at the girl curiously—wondering, perhaps, she thought, with a twinge of mortified pride, how an innkeeper's daughter came to look like a lady.

But there was no diminution of *empressement* in his manner; and he exerted himself to be agreeable with such success that Valérie was fairly fascinated. Never before had she tasted flattery so sweet as this young English nobleman subtly contrived to convey in every look and tone, making her vain heart beat high with triumph, and a vague, undefined sort of hope.

The afternoon fled quickly by; and when he rose, it was with the understanding that he was to return to dine with Madame that day, and spend the evening in their company.

"And now I must go and make myself presentable," he remarked. "I did not bring my man, for he is so very fine a gentleman that I feared he might put your modest household out, madame. But I am a helpless creature without him, and have managed to lose the key of my dressing-case. Does there happen to be a locksmith in the neighbourhood?"

"Certainly," Madame replied, touching the bell. "I will send for one."

When the door closed on her guest the widow dropped her company manners, and darting across the room, seized Valérie's hands, and clapped them together with a triumphant laugh.

"I knew it—I foresaw it!" she cried. "You have made a conquest. Now you need not put on that incredulous look; you know it as well as I do, *petite chatte*! Lord Harcourt is quite prepared to fall in love with you."

"Pray, dear madame, do not joke," the girl returned, yet laughing and blushing. "If you think he is likely to be in any such danger you had better tell him that—that I am engaged."

"Indeed, I shall tell him nothing of the sort," said Madame Lebrun. "I should like you to be the wife of a fine young English noble, my dear, and to be mistress of a grand château in England, where I could come and visit you. It would be utterly preposterous for a girl with your advantages to throw yourself away upon Jean Lemartel."

Valérie sighed. If Jean were but a nobleman, with a grand château and more wealth than could be counted! "I suppose," she said, quitting the subject, "that Lord Harcourt is inhabiting the apartments you prepared for his father and mother?"

"To be sure he is. They sent him to take possession that I should not be quite disappointed. It was so good of them ! But, my dear," added Madame, shrewdly, "I foresee he will spend more of his time in my rooms than in his. And there is one caution I should like to give you, Valérie—do not mention at home that it is young Harcourt who has come ; let them think—as of course they will think—that it is the old lord, his father. If your mother thought any young fellow was here, lord or not lord, she would stop your visits forthwith."

Three or four weeks have passed away. Summer is waning into autumn, and the rich, undulating country round St. Jean is all a sea of golden wheat. At Les Ormes, Jean Lemartel's farm, the reaping machine is already at work, and his leisure moments are few, though he rarely fails in his evening visit to the Lion d'Or.

But of late, the course of Jean's true love had run anything but smoothly. A shadow and constraint had risen up, he scarcely knew how, between himself and Valérie. Her manner was strangely capricious ; sometimes cold and distant, at others unusually gentle, with a touch of deprecation, as if conscious of deserving his displeasure. He felt puzzled, doubtful, and vaguely uneasy.

One sultry afternoon Jean made his appearance at the Lion d'Or some few hours before his usual time. Red-headed Berthe, the stout, hard-working house-girl, who was seated on a bench outside the kitchen door, preparing vegetables for the soup, glanced up in surprise as he entered the courtyard.

"Is Mademoiselle at home ?" he inquired.

"No, monsieur. She is spending the afternoon with Madame Lebrun."

"Again ?" he exclaimed involuntarily. "Why, she was there yesterday !"

The girl glanced at him oddly under her light eyelashes.

"Shall I tell him what I know ?" she debated within herself. "It would serve Mam'zelle Valérie right. Little cat ! For all her superior airs, she is not above having a sweetheart on the sly ; and telling things to Rose that she doesn't tell me ! Yes, monsieur," she said aloud, "Mademoiselle has been invited very often since Madame's visitor arrived."

"What visitor ? Oh, you mean the lodger—the old English lord."

Berthe looked up innocently. "Comment, comment, Monsieur Lemartel, you did not know ? It was not the old lord who came and is staying at the châtelet ; it is his son, a young and handsome gentleman, and a great admirer, Rose says, of Mademoiselle."

Jean started as though he had been struck. Rose was the personal maid of Madame and Mademoiselle Destrée, having nothing to do with the service of the hotel ; and it was Rose who attended her

young mistress to Madame Lebrun's and back whenever she went there; for a well brought up young French girl does not go out alone.

"A young man staying there—the son!" exclaimed Jean, his bronzed face flushing to the temples. "I think you must be in error, Berthe. Mademoiselle has not said so."

Berthe laughed quietly. "You can inquire of anybody over there, M. Jean," she said, as she rose and shook the parings from her apron. "It is the young one, sure enough, monsieur, and he is over head and ears in love with our demoiselle. He will inherit a sumptuous palace in England, and millions and millions of francs a year!"

Jean believed her. He felt instinctively that it was true, and that this was the explanation of the change in Valérie which had so perplexed him.

Losing not a minute, he turned away, and sought the train for Bainville, his heart burning with anger, and sick with jealous pain.

The Bainville season was now at its height, and the bright, breezy little watering-place was overflowing with visitors. On this particular afternoon, the gardens of the casino were thronged with a gaily-dressed crowd, promenading to the sound of a band, which was vigorously attacking the Overture to Zampa. Among the groups seated under the glass-roofed verandah in front of the building were Madame Lebrun and Valérie.

The girl looked languid and listless, and her eyes wandered absently over the crowd, as if her thoughts were elsewhere. Her companion was fluttering her fan, and glancing restlessly towards the entrance gate.

"How provoking it is!" she muttered at last. "The concert will be over before the Vicomte joins us—thanks to that tiresome friend of his, that vulgar Mr. Lester. I wonder how he can tolerate the familiarity of the man. Here he comes at last, and Lester, of course, with him still!"

Mr. Lester, a friend of Lord Harcourt's, had arrived at Bainville the previous evening; he was a stout, common-looking man of forty, whose fashionably cut clothes seemed to sit uneasily on his clumsy figure.

The two men formed a curious contrast as they advanced slowly up the broad carriage drive leading to the casino, Mr. Lester talking earnestly, while his companion listened with unconcealed impatience. At the foot of the verandah steps the Viscount paused.

"I have given you my answer," he said brusquely. "You are wasting breath in saying more."

"And, after what I have told you, you persist in staying?"

"Over to-day, yes. What difference can twenty-four hours make?"

"All the difference between safety and ——"

"Hold your tongue!" the young man broke in, hurriedly glancing over his shoulder. "Do you want all the world to hear?"

The other made an impatient movement. "Well, I say no more."

Have your own way—and take the consequences,” he retorted, and with a surly nod, he turned on his heel.

The Viscount shrugged his shoulders, and ran lightly up the steps to where Valérie and her chaperon were sitting.

“I beg pardon for being so late, but I’ve been occupied. Lester has brought me bad news,” he continued, as he drew a chair to Valérie’s side. “At least, it is bad to me, for it compels me to return to England to-morrow.”

“What do you say, milord?” the widow exclaimed, bending forward to look at him. “You are going to-morrow? But what has happened? Is Lord Delamere worse?”

“Oh, no, it has nothing to do with—with my father; it is a matter of business which would not interest you.”

“But when it is settled you will return, I hope?”

“Oh, of course; though I don’t know when—it depends,” he answered. “Will you take a turn with me in the grounds?” he presently said in a lower tone to Valérie.

She hesitated; struck with a sudden shyness and reluctance to be alone with him. “I fear there is not time,” she objected; “the concert is almost over, and I must be going home.”

“There is plenty of time. It may be our last walk together,” he whispered. “Come.”

“Go, Valérie—don’t be childish,” said Madame Lebrun, graciously, believing in her own mind that the young lord was going to propose. Thus adjured, the girl rose, and they descended the steps into the garden.

Had she been less preoccupied, she would have noticed a familiar figure which emerged from one of the side paths as they passed—Jean Lemartel. He stood for a moment as if stunned, gazing after them with a dark look of suppressed passion on his face, which altered it strangely. Then, taking a sudden resolution, he turned, and slowly followed them.

Meantime, Valérie’s companion had led her to the terrace by the sea, which was comparatively deserted, and as they paced slowly along, he was speaking in an earnest undertone, without his usual drawl.

“You must know that I love you, Valérie—that I have loved you from the first moment I saw you!” began Lord Harcourt. “I have struggled with the feeling, knowing what opposition I should meet with from my family; but—but I find I can’t live without you. Even the idea of a short separation makes me wretched. But, my sweet Valérie—if you love me we need not be separated even for a day. I will take you with me when I go to-morrow.”

She drew her hand, which he had taken, from him, stepping back in surprise.

“Take me with you, Lord Harcourt! What do you mean?”

“I mean that we can do what many a couple, situated as we are,
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have done before us—get married quietly at a registrar's, and save a world of fuss and trouble. Of course my people will be vexed at first; but when once the knot is tied they can only receive you, and you will take your proper position in society as my wife, and—as—as—the future Countess of Delamere, for I fear my poor father cannot be here long. Say that you consent, my darling—that you will come with me!”

They reached the end of the terrace as he spoke. He put her hand within his arm as they stood, pressing it to his side.

Valérie's heart beat fast, and her colour came and went. Her ambitious dreams were realised; the prize she had longed for, wealth, station, lay in her grasp. How was it that it seemed all at once to have lost its value, like the fairy gold which turns to dead leaves in the hand?

He watched her face keenly in the silence; but she did not speak.

“Don't keep me in suspense,” he pleaded, bending towards her, as she stood, with one hand on the low railing, gazing absently at the sunlit sea. “Say that you will come!”

She drew a deep breath and looked at him. For the first time it struck her that there was something hard and cruel in the handsome face; a treacherous light in the cold blue eyes.

“It is so sudden,” she faltered. “Why could we not wait until you return?”

“How do I know that I should find you in the same mind? ‘*Souvent femme varie!*’ No, it must be now or never.”

“Then it will be never,” Valérie replied with decision, “for I certainly shall not consent to anything so disreputable as a runaway marriage. What would my father and mother feel? What would the world say of me ——”

“Bah! who cares what the world says?” he broke in, sharply. “Pardon my impatience, Valérie; if you loved me, you would not give that a moment's consideration.”

“Perhaps I should not,” she answered quietly; “but as it is I do.”

He was evidently surprised. Biting his lip, he gave her a look which startled her.

“Thank you; that is explicit,” he said, with a short angry laugh.

“Then I am to conclude that you have drawn me on to a declaration merely for the pleasure of refusing me?”

“I have not drawn you on,” she said indignantly.

“Of course not!” he cried, with a disagreeable sneer.

“But I have not,” she said.

“Of course not!” repeated he, in the same tone. “You and your friend did not speculate upon me from the first, did you? Though, as I have since learnt, you were not quite at liberty to do so, being engaged to another man. I wonder, by the way, if Corydon is aware how you have been amusing yourself lately? It might almost be a charity to tell him.”

"It is unnecessary; he has heard already," said a voice behind them, and turning, with a start, Valérie found herself face to face with Jean Lemartel.

The colour rushed to her cheeks, then receded, leaving them white and ghastly. After one swift, terrified glance at him, she drooped her head with a burning sense of humiliation.

My lord put up his eye-glass, and surveyed the intruder with a supercilious stare.

"Is this—a—gentleman—a friend of yours, mademoiselle?" he drawled.

"My name is Lemartel, and I am—or was—Mademoiselle Destrée's *fiancé*," Jean replied, some menace in the studied calmness of his tone.

"Corydon himself, by Jove!" muttered the Englishman, with a suppressed laugh. "Charmed to make your acquaintance, monsieur," he said aloud. "We ought to be friends, as we are companions in misfortune. This cruel little beauty has been playing fast and loose with us both, it seems."

"I decline to discuss Mademoiselle Destrée's conduct with you," Lemartel rejoined; "but I will tell you my opinion of your own, if you choose. Whatever your rank may be by the accident of birth, your actions are those of a scoundrel."

An ugly oath escaped the other, and he lifted his cane threateningly. Before it could descend, Jean wrested it from his hand, broke it in two, and tossed it over the fence. Then, seizing Lord Harcourt's wrist in a grasp of iron, he lowered his voice, so as to be inaudible to Valérie.

"Who but an unmitigated scoundrel would seek to entrap an innocent girl to ruin by such a proposal as I overheard just now? You know well enough that a marriage so contracted by a French girl would not be legal either in France or England! You could shake off the tie when you pleased—and you know this, I say. What is your defence?"

"I shall not condescend to defend myself to you. Take your hand from my wrist, sir, and let me go."

For a moment Jean kept his hold, looking down at him with so dangerous a glitter in his eyes that the man cowered, and Valérie uttered a faint cry of alarm. Jean looked at her; and with a gesture of angry contempt, flung his rival aside.

"Go, then; and if you are wise, keep out of my path in future—and out of Mademoiselle Destrée's. I have no right now to control your actions," he added gravely, turning to Valérie, "but I must ask what you are going to do. You cannot remain in the company of this man."

"I was going home," the girl faltered. "Rose is on the bench at the gate, waiting for me. Please make my excuses to Madame Lebrun," she added, addressing her late companion. "Adieu, monsieur!"

As if not caring to trust her, Jean walked by her side towards the gate. Milord looked after them with a smile which made his face sinister.

"Not 'adieu,' little jilt, but 'au revoir,'" he muttered. "I swear I will win you yet, if it be only to punish you for this. *Nous verrons !*"

Valérie's heart beat fast when she was alone with her lover, and for a moment she had not courage to speak.

"Jean," she began at last, glancing timidly at his pale, stern face, "I know that you are very angry with me, and that I have deserved your anger ; but——"

"I am not angry," he interrupted, with a cold composure which took her by surprise. "A false and fickle woman is not worth an honest man's anger or regret."

The colour rushed to her face. "Indeed, I have not been false to you," she protested. "I have done wrong in suppressing the truth at home about M. Harcourt, and in letting him pay attention to me, but I never really cared for him—and I refused him just now as you must have heard."

"Yes, I heard ; I heard all," said Jean, with a bitter smile. "I know that while I was living in a fool's paradise of love and hope, you were amusing yourself with this fine gentleman ; laughing, no doubt, together, you and he, at the simple lover who believed in you so blindly."

"No, no, Jean," the girl exclaimed ; "I never mentioned you to him in my life. Deceitful I have been ; fickle, if you will ; but in my heart I have not ceased to—to love and respect you, and I have learned of late to value your affection as I never did before."

"We often learn the worth of a thing for the first time when we lose it," he commented, coldly.

"Do you mean that—that I have lost your love for ever ?" Valérie faltered, pausing, and looking at him in forlorn appeal.

"You have lost my trust," was his grave reply ; "and without perfect confidence love cannot exist."

"And you can renounce me calmly—coldly, without a pang ?" the girl exclaimed.

"Without a pang ?" he echoed, and his broad chest heaved with a tearless sob ; "may you never feel such pain as it costs me. But we must part. I dare not trust the honour and happiness of my life in your keeping. Friends we may still be, if you will, but lovers nevermore."

The girl's heart contracted with a spasm which was like physical pain to her. A wave of bitterest regret and self-reproach swept over her, then subsided, leaving her with a reckless feeling of indifference to everything.

"If I am not worthy of your love, I am equally unworthy of your

friendship," she responded, in an altered voice. "Henceforth we will be strangers. Here is your ring."

She drew it from her finger as she spoke, but instead of handing it to him, she, with a sudden passionate movement, flung it into the advancing waves. Then, joining Rose, she walked quickly with her to the railway station.

"The weather is changing, there will be rain before night," remarked Madame Destrée about five o'clock on the following evening, as she glanced from the stocking she was mending to the darkening sky.

"Ay, it looks like it," rejoined her husband, laying down the *France du Nord*; "and Jean will be caught in it. I met him this afternoon starting off to Samer on foot, by the 'old road.' He seemed out of spirits; he and Valérie have been having a tiff, I expect. Where is Valérie?"

"Lying down. She complained of a headache—overtired herself yesterday at Bainville, of course!"

Madame's tone was tart, and the innkeeper rubbed his bald forehead with a thoughtful frown. "Don't you think, wife," he said, "that she has gone a little bit too much to Bainville lately?"

"I think!" retorted Madame. "If she goes and takes up her bed and board there, it's no business of mine. You took that out of my hands, you know."

"The girl has not seemed like herself," he said mildly. "Go up to her, mère; see if she won't come down."

Madame deliberately finished the thin place she was darning before moving to comply. She was away a few minutes; when she returned there was a white look on her face which startled M. Destrée.

"What is the matter?" he exclaimed. "Is the child ill?"

Madame shook her head, and carefully closed the door before replying.

"It is very strange," she said, lowering her voice. "Valérie is not in the house; and—and—Berthe has been telling me a tale."

Berthe had a crooked kind of temper. It chanced that Rose had had a holiday given her that day, which Berthe resented. It was not long since Rose had a holiday before, while she—Berthe—had not been given one for ages and ages. Besides this, Berthe thought it might be unwise to keep silence any longer upon what she knew, and she opened her mind to her mistress.

About half-an-hour before Madame Destrée went upstairs to her daughter's room, Berthe had seen Mademoiselle Valérie go quietly out at the side door, a small black travelling bag in her hand. Berthe, going up presently, found Mademoiselle's bedroom in disorder, and part of a torn letter and envelope lying on the floor.

"Berthe tells me it was brought here this morning by a boy," related Madame Destrée to her husband, as she put the letter into his hand. "The boy said he was to wait for an answer, but Valérie

sent word down that her answer was merely 'Yes.' Read it, Jacques."

He took it from his wife, mechanically, looking at her in a bewildered manner, carried it to the window, and read it aloud. The fragment began abruptly in the middle of a sentence.

"—— but in spite of your cruelty, I love you more madly than ever, and am determined not to give you up. My proposal yesterday scandalised you, but perhaps you will view it in another light if I tell you that Madame Lebrun approves the plan, and offers to accompany us, to play propriety. We shall wait for you in a closed carriage at the Abbey ruins this evening, at six o'clock. In a very few hours we shall be in London, and by mid-day to-morrow you will be my wife. Send a word by the bearer—yes or no, and let it be 'Yes,' my queen.

"Your devoted

"HARCOURT."

The innkeeper turned towards his wife, his face blank with consternation.

"What in heaven's name does this mean?" he cried.

"It means," she answered, with angry emphasis, "that Valérie has disgraced us by an elopement—English fashion. You have only yourself to thank for it, Jacques."

"But who is the man?" asked the unhappy father.

"Ah! Berthe has told me. It is all of a piece, husband, and Valérie has been as deceitful as the rest. It was not the old lord who came to stay at the Châlet Beauregard, but his son, the young lord, and he has been making love to Valérie all these weeks. Her precious friend, Madame Lebrun, has led her into this entanglement!"

Jacques Destrée crushed the letter in his hand, with the first oath his wife had ever heard from his lips.

"She shall answer for it," he said, hoarsely, "and so shall this man, were he fifty times a lord, if my child comes to harm. But it is not too late to stop them. I can reach the Abbey before——"

He was interrupted by the sound of wheels in the courtyard, and an open carriage drew up at the door. The first person who alighted was Madame Lebrun. She was followed by an agent de police in uniform, and a stranger of semi-clerical appearance, evidently English; a tall, wiry man, whose clean-shaven face would have been singularly expressionless but for a pair of keen, observant grey eyes, which seemed to "make a note" of everything they rested on.

Brushing past Berthe, who had come forward, the widow burst into the sitting-room, dishevelled with haste and agitation.

"Monsieur Destrée—such a terrible thing has happened," she began. "Ah, madame! I am almost out of my senses. To think that I should have been so deceived. Even now I can hardly believe it."

The French policeman stepped forward.

"Allow me to explain to monsieur," he interposed. "My English colleague here——"

"Inspector Bennett, of Scotland Yard, at your service," put in the latter, blandly.

"Is charged with a warrant for the arrest of *le nommé* Francis Walton, alias Marquis de la Roche, alias Viscount Harcourt, an accomplished swindler and *chevalier d'industrie*, who has been 'wanted' by the police for some time back for various clever frauds. His latest exploit was to rob a young English nobleman, son of Lord Delamere, to whom he had contrived to get introduced in Paris as a Frenchman of distinction. He wormed himself into Lord Harcourt's confidence, acquiring an intimate knowledge of all his family affairs; and when the scent after him got too hot in Paris, he decamped with his lordship's desk, containing some money and a little jewellery, and——"

"And came straight off to me, passing himself off as Lord Harcourt," impatiently interrupted the widow, who was boiling over with her wrongs. "He thought rightly that my house was the last place where the police would look for him, and he has been living at my expense all the while, the coquin—*Va!*"

"We should have nailed him to-day though," said the English officer, "but that a confederate of his got scent of his danger and came on to warn him. Walton has given us the slip for the moment, but we imagine that your daughter, monsieur, may hold a clue to his whereabouts."

"He wrote to Valérie this morning," the widow explained, "and I thought perhaps—where is she?" she broke off, looking round.

"Where is she?" the innkeeper echoed in a tone which startled her; "that is the question I must ask you, madame. What have you done with my daughter?"

She looked at him in astonishment.

"I—Monsieur Destrée? I don't understand you," she exclaimed. Then as a sudden light flashed upon her: "Don't tell me," she gasped, "that she is gone away with that villain!"

"Why should we tell you what you know already?" sharply spoke Madame Destrée. "You were in his confidence—the elopement was of your planning. Read his letter, and deny it if you can."

The widow glanced over it, and contemptuously tossed the paper aside.

"It is false," she said, indignantly. "I did not even know that he had proposed a clandestine marriage. I should never, never have countenanced it. It is true that I encouraged his attentions; I own to that; I thought it would be such a grand match for Valérie; and yesterday evening, when he told me she had refused him, I felt greatly vexed. My poor, pretty Valérie."

But police officers, whether French or English, know better than to waste time in sentiment. Accompanied by the innkeeper, they got into the waiting carriage, and were driven away at a gallop. The torn note had given them a clue as to the possible hiding-place of Walton.

The ruined Abbey of St. Evrard, with its crumbling ivy-mantled walls, crowned the summit of the hill on which the town was built. It was approached by what was known—in contradistinction to a more convenient route lately constructed—as the “old road,” which wound up the steep hillside, and skirting the ruin, dipped abruptly into the wooded valley beyond.

Except by visitors to the Abbey, this road was seldom used, and was already becoming grass-grown and neglected. It looked particularly gloomy in the thickening dusk of this rainy evening. No living creatures were in sight, except the sheep which cropped the short herbage at the foot of the ruin, and a solitary woman's figure, leaning on the low stone wall which enclosed it. It was Valérie—first at the trysting-place.

The girl's face was white and troubled, and her eyes looked out wistfully at the wide darkening landscape beneath her, as if they were gazing into the mist and shadow of her own future.

What would that future be? Until now she had not allowed herself to reflect on what she was doing; yielding to a blind impulse of resentment and wounded pride; but now that question rose up before her, and struck chill to her heart. She knew that she neither loved nor respected the man in whose power she was about to place herself. He could give her, she supposed, all that she had been lately thinking most desirable—rank, riches, and power; but would these compensate for what she was relinquishing—the home she had left, and the love she had lost?

Suddenly a light dog-cart came in sight, rapidly mounting the hill towards the Abbey. Valérie moved towards the flight of worn stone steps giving entrance to the enclosure (which was above the level of the road), and looked doubtfully at the advancing vehicle.

At first she did not recognise the driver, who was muffled in an ulster, with his hat pulled low over his eyes; but when he drew rein at the foot of the steps, she saw that it was Lord Harcourt—alone. He looked up and called to her, but seeing that she did not stir, shrugged his shoulders impatiently, and, after glancing up and down the lonely road, ascended the steps to her side.

“I beg a hundred pardons for keeping you waiting, my dearest, but I was detained at the last moment,” he began, hurriedly. He was flushed, and looked anxious and excited. “Come, we have not a moment to lose.”

Valérie drew back. “Where is Madame Lebrun?” she asked.

“Madame did not care to come, as it threatened rain; she will meet us at the Embarcadère,” he answered, without looking at her.

There was something in his tone and manner which inspired her with sudden distrust.

"I believe you are deceiving me," she said, gazing at him searchingly.

"Believe what you like, only come," he returned, lightly. "We have a good-hour's drive before us, and the boat starts at seven."

"If you can deceive me in one thing you may in another; I shall not trust myself to you," was her reply. "I feel sure Madame Lebrun never agreed to come."

His face darkened. "And you think I shall let you slip through my fingers like that? No, my beauty; I have won you and I mean to keep you."

"Not by force," she retorted, as he laid his hand on her wrist.

"Come, Valérie, don't be foolish," he expostulated. "I deceived you about Madame, I confess, but all's fair in love and war. It was a harmless fiction to quiet your scruples; we shall get on much better without her. Come, it is only the first step which costs. When once we are fairly started you will thank me for insisting."

He threw his arm round her to draw her down the steps; but Valérie, thoroughly roused now, resisted with all her might. "I will not—I will not!" she cried passionately. "Let me go home—let me go back to——"

"To your rustic swain," he put in, with an angry laugh. "That you shall not, my girl, or I shall still be in his debt for yesterday's business. Little fool! do you know what you are refusing? Think what I can give you."

"You can give me nothing that will compensate for what I have lost through you," she returned. "I deserve to be called a fool for ever having listened to you, but I have come to my senses now."

"A little too late," he sneered, and fairly lifting her from her feet, in spite of her struggles, he carried her down the steps.

"Coward—coward!" she panted. "Ah, you would not dare if—if Jean were here! Jean—help, help!"

She uttered the name almost unconsciously, with no hope that her appeal would be heard. But it had hardly left her lips when there was an answering shout from the turn of the road; a sound of hurried footsteps, and before she could realise what had happened, she was in Jean Lemartel's arms, while his rival measured his length on the ground.

The latter staggered to his feet, bewildered by the sudden attack. Then, recognising his assailant, he uttered a savage oath, and slipped his hand into the breast of his coat.

Confused and excited as she was, Valérie noticed the movement, and saw that Jean was in danger. With a cry that rang shrilly through the evening stillness, she flung herself between the two men, and received in her own shoulder the shot which was intended for her lover. Jean caught her as she was falling.

"Stand back—don't touch her!" he said hoarsely, as the Englishman, who looked genuinely dismayed at the mishap, approached to assist him. At that moment, the carriage containing Monsieur Destrée and the two policemen came galloping into sight. Walton at once comprehended the peril he was in, and hurriedly made for the dog-cart.

The men shouted, and called "Stop him! Stop him!" and Jean, laying the fainting girl gently on the grass by the roadside, sprang forward and caught the reins as the other mounted. Walton lashed at him furiously with the whip, while the frightened horse reared and plunged, but Lemartel kept his hold until the carriage dashed up, and its occupants came to his assistance. A short, sharp scuffle, when Walton was overpowered, and had handcuffs put on his wrists.

"Sorry to interfere with your little plans, my Lord Viscoun' said the detective drily, "but I fear your pleasure trip must be deferred—at any rate for the present. By-and-by you may perhaps get change of air and scene at Government expense."

"But what is all this?" gasped the innkeeper, as he now saw Valérie.

Jean Lemartel explained: Valérie had received the shot which was meant for him.

Showing signs of returning consciousness, she was carefully lifted into the carriage by her father and Jean. The officers drove off in the dog-cart with their prisoner, to convey him into the safe keeping of that justice at whose hands he would assuredly get his deserts.

Valérie's wound proved more serious than was at first supposed, and it was many weeks before she was able to leave her bed, and be about again. Nothing could conquer her languor and depression, and she shrank nervously from visitors. Not a day passed without Jean's calling at the inn to inquire after her. His manner to her was invariably gentle, but its reserve and constraint seemed to augment the gulf between them.

She knew that it could not be otherwise; but, all the same, her heart rebelled passionately against the change, and she felt as if she would give half her life to regain the faithful heart she had so lightly thrown away.

One day she sat in her favourite jasmine bower, now withered and forlorn. The autumn morning was mild as spring, but grey and melancholy, with that hushed and pensive stillness in the air, which seems like Nature's mood of calm regret for the year's decay.

Valérie was sitting with her hands listlessly clasped on the rustic table before her, when the garden gate swung to, and Jean came slowly down the path. She did not see him till he was close to her; then she started and half rose, as if her first impulse were to fly.

He paused in the arched entrance of the arbour, his dark eyes

dwelling earnestly on her face. "Why do you avoid me, Valérie?" he asked gravely. "Are you afraid of me?"

She made no answer, but with a constrained smile, sank on to the bench again.

Jean took his seat at her side. "You need not fear that I shall touch upon unwelcome topics," he said. "The past is dead and buried so far as I am concerned—except one fact which I do not wish to forget; that you saved my life at the risk of your own."

She shook her head. "But for me you would never have been in danger. Oh, Jean," she faltered, laying her hand on his arm, "you do not know what I have suffered during my illness—the pain and remorse I have felt! I cannot expect to regain your—your—what I lost—but let me know that I have your forgiveness; that you think of me without bitterness."

Jean took the little pleading hand in both his own, looking at her with a serious smile.

"There is no room in my heart for resentment, Valérie. It is full to the brim of—love."

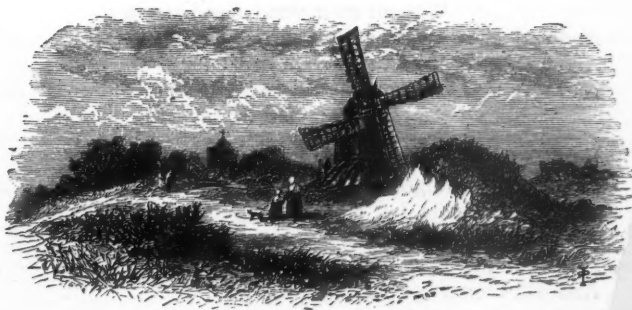
She started, raising her eyes with an incredulous look.

"In spite of everything, I love you. Love is a plant of obstinate growth, my dear, not easily destroyed when once it has taken firm root."

"But—I—can't believe it, Jean."

"Then the sooner I prove it to you, the better," he whispered tenderly. "My darling, how soon will you be my wife?"

With a sigh of sweet contentment, Valérie allowed herself to be drawn into those protecting arms; and all the troubles of the past were effaced as he kissed away her shower of happy tears.



SWEET SUMMER.

THE spring has fled with its shine and shower,
 And summer reigns, in the radiant hour
 When noon burns sweetness from every flower

That turns its face to the sun.
 She reigns in the waning blue of the skies,
 When the level light of late evening lies
 On pastures golden with memories
 Of dear dreams, over and done.

O summer, splendid crown of the year,
 Beyond faint spring and wan autumn dear,
 Hope and remembrance are all they bear,
 But joy is the soul of thee—
 A soul that stirs in the unripe corn,
 In the dewy hush of the new sweet morn,
 When in leafy woods soft echoes are born
 Of the far-off song of the sea.

O summer, sweet summer, when lovers stray
 Past the green mill-pool by the shady way,
 Through the fields soft-wreathed in the new-mown hay,
 And down through the leafy lane ;
 When the young dream dreams, and the old folks stand
 And look out over the quiet land,
 And sigh (not sadly, if hand clasps hand)
 That youth comes never again !

For the summer dies—as our youth must die—
 And vain are the prayer and the passionate cry,
 The roses and beautiful days go by
 With all their wonder and worth ;
 And snows are over the lily's head,
 And a sheet of ice on the rose's bed,
 And love may die, now the leaves are dead
 And winter is lord of the earth.

Yet listen, sad heart, to the glad refrain
 Of the brown-winged birds in the brown-hedged lane ;
 Summer has gone, but she comes again !

Sweet summer never can die.
 And youth, sweet youth, is immortal, too,
 And will bloom again as the roses do,
 And love is eternal—if hearts be true—

Though youth and the rose go by.

E. NESBIT.

